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President: Mr. Jeremić ..... (Serbia)

The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.

High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels

Agenda item 83

The rule of law at the national and international levels

Draft resolution (A/67/L.1)

The President: I declare open the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, held in accordance with resolutions 65/32 of 6 December 2010 and 66/102 of 9 December 2011.

Statement by the President

The President: It is my great honour to welcome participants to the General Assembly, the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. On the eve of the general debate, we have gathered for this historic High-level Meeting on the rule of law. It is the first time that this critical issue is being thematically discussed by heads of State and Government in the Hall. I am convinced that today's deliberations will reaffirm our common faith in the everlasting moral pre-eminence of justice.

I would like to take this opportunity to voice my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his leadership on this issue, and to thank all the statesmen who will participate in the debate. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to the co-facilitators, the Permanent Representatives of Mexico and Denmark, for their successful efforts to achieve consensus on the draft outcome document.

The draft resolution (A/67/L.1) before us reaffirms the interest of all United Nations Members in the establishment of fair, robust and enforceable laws. Within States, the just application of the rule of law stands at the foundation of responsible governance. In the international arena, it helps ensure the predictability of actions and the legitimacy of outcomes. In the words of the draft text that we are about to adopt, it has fundamental importance for political dialogue and cooperation among all States.

International law must not be seen as a utopian aspiration with little relevance to the conduct of world affairs. The principles and rules codified by centuries of treaties and agreements between nations should serve legitimate State interests rather than trying to override them. By strictly adhering to the rule of law, we discourage recourse to war. As one of the founders of the international legal tradition, Hugo Grotius, famously wrote, once arms are taken up, all respect for the law, whether human or divine, is lost, as though by some edict a fury had been let loose to commit every crime. When we observe international law, we put ourselves in the service of preventing that fury from being unleashed. Upon that fundamental tenet we have built the United Nations.

I believe this High-level Meeting signals a new landmark moment in the global peace process. I am pleased that it is taking place within the

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overarching theme I have chosen for the work of this session, "Bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means". Throughout the course of our deliberations, I believe it is critical that we not lose sight of the importance of fully respecting the equality, sovereignty and territorial integrity of United Nations States Members. These are not only some of the most basic precepts of the Charter; they are, in my view, indispensable to achieving the first stated purpose of the United Nations, which is to maintain peace and security.

To be effective, the corpus of international law must be observed by all Member States, great and small, rich and poor alike. If our aim is to strengthen trust between nations, the respect for accepted norms cannot be ambiguous or selective. Everyone must know that everyone else will adhere to the same principles and rules. Today's draft outcome document recognizes the importance of national ownership and rule-of-law activities. It stands at the heart of the social contract between a State and its citizens. The broad diversity of legal traditions is brought together in the draft document that there are common features founded on international norms and standards. The United Nations has been central to their establishment. As President, I will work with Member States to ensure that the General Assembly sharpens its focus on the effective implementation of best practices in the area of the rule of law.

In the discussions to follow, I believe we can draw inspiration from words that Montesquieu wrote long ago: "There is no nation so powerful as the one that obeys its laws not from principles of fear or reason, but from passion." As President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, it is my great hope that passion for the rule of law will prevail, and thus empower all Member States to ensure the equitable delivery of justice at home in their full adherence to the tenets of international law abroad. Realizing the scope of our task and the imperative need for success, I am confident that we shall proceed with humble resolve, in a spirit of renewed cooperation, on the righteous path of peace.

I now give the floor to His Excellency the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): The rule of law is like the law of gravity. It is the rule of law that ensures that our world and our societies remain bound together and that order prevails over chaos. It unites us around common values and anchors us in the common good. But unlike the law of gravity, the rule of law does not arise spontaneously. It must be nourished by the continuing and concerted efforts of real leaders. Today, for the first time, heads of Government, ministers of justice, prosecutors general and representatives of civil society are meeting in the Hall in order to debate exclusively on strengthening justice for the citizens of every country in the world.

It has been a long wait. But the United Nations has been striving to strengthen the rule of law for decades now, and today's meeting reflects an increasingly vast world movement that is bringing together ordinary citizens who are demanding justice, respect for the principle of accountability and an end to impunity. We know that strengthening the rule of law means consolidating the three pillars of the United Nations: peace, development and human rights.

Justice is not an abstract concept. It is a voter's card, a contract in good and due form, the badge of a policeman who inspires trust, and the birth certificate that guarantees a little girl the right to an official life. The widow who inherits nothing, the human rights activist subjected to reprisals, and the victim of sexual violence all need the rule of law to obtain justice.

(*spoke in English*)

The Charter of the United Nations — the "constitution" of the international community — provides indispensable tools to deepen the rule of law: the universal standard-setting power of the General Assembly, the enforcement power of the Security Council and the judicial power of the International Court of Justice.

The wider body of international law developed at the United Nations gives the international community a basis for cooperation and for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, along with the means to ensure that there is no relapse into fighting.

And with the development of accountability mechanisms, no war criminals should ever find safe harbour in the modern world.

The rule of law is also fundamental to development and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Today's discussion should strengthen our resolve to ensure that the post-2015 international development agenda takes full account of the rule of law.

I am proud that the United Nations is promoting the rule of law in more than 150 countries. I am grateful for the many voluntary pledges being made today. I thank the Governments that have made commitments. But I ask for concrete action in five specific areas.

First, I call on all States to commit to the equal application of the law at both the national and international levels. There should be no selectivity in applying resolutions, decisions and laws. We cannot allow political self-interest to undermine justice.

Secondly, I call on heads of State and Government to uphold the highest standards of the rule of law in their decision-making at all times. The rule of law must be the foundation for every government action.

Thirdly, I call on all heads of State and Government to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Fourthly, I urge Member States to support peace by strengthening United Nations initiatives in the field of the rule of law: training police, improving corrections and enhancing the judiciary in fragile and conflict-torn countries around the world.

Fifthly, and fundamentally, I urge members to adopt the solemn draft declaration that is before the Assembly. Make the most of this truly historic occasion to international law and justice and to an international order based on the rule of law.

Civil society plays a crucial role in holding leaders to account, and I urge the Assembly to keep pushing for action in all of those action areas. It is not enough to disperse our rule of law activities across the United Nations agenda. They deserve a central place in the structure of our work.

I count on the Assembly to help forge a new, structured approach to strengthening the rule of law and delivering justice so that we can achieve peace, development and human rights.

Strengthening the rule of law is for every country and is in everyone's interest. It is as essential within countries as it is among the family of nations.

Today's meeting is a milestone, but it is not an end in itself. Our challenge now is to follow up, generate momentum and continue to give a high profile to this essential foundation for a better future.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

The Assembly will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/67/L.1, entitled "Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels". May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/67/L.1?

Draft resolution A/67/L.1 was adopted (resolution 67/1).

The President: I wish to express my special appreciation once again to Ambassador Carsten Staur of Denmark and to Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba of Mexico, who so ably and patiently conducted the discussions and complex negotiations in the informal consultations on the resolution. Of course, I also thank all Member States for their valuable contribution to the successful completion of the outcome document.

I now give the floor to the President of the International Court of Justice, His Excellency Mr. Peter Tomka.

Mr. Tomka (International Court of Justice) (*spoke in French*): I welcome the opportunity to address the General Assembly on behalf of the International Court of Justice on this important topic, the rule of law at the national and international levels. I wish to make a few remarks on the international aspect of this concept.

The Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations confirms that the founding fathers of the Organization, when they decided to create the United Nations, in 1945, were determined "to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained". They also reaffirmed their "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

The concept of the rule of law is, and should be, at the very heart of the Organization's mission. All organs of the United Nations must fully adhere to applicable international legal rules. Any action that does not conform to law is devoid of legitimacy. The international dimension of the concept of the rule of law was aptly expressed in the draft Declaration on Rights and Duties of States, prepared by the International Law Commission in 1949. Article 14 states that "Every State has the duty to conduct its relations with other States in accordance with international law and with the principle that the sovereignty of each State is subject to the supremacy of international law."

The United Nations has achieved impressive results in the normative realm; the list of conventions codifying international law and contributing to its progressive development is long. The list of United Nations human rights conventions is also considerable.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has rightly stressed that, today, the real challenge lies in the implementation of the existing judicial framework. The application of international legal rules and the implementation of international legal obligations are not always free from controversies and differences, which leads to open disputes between States.

At the international level, the concept of the rule of law requires the existence of effective and, insofar as possible, compulsory adjudicative mechanisms. The legal maxim nemo iudex in causa sua — no one can be a judge in one's own case — confirmed by the Permanent Court of International Justice in 1925, should also be applied in relations between States.

The Charter of the United Nations declares as one of its principles that all Members "shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered". Judicial settlement of the disputes between States is one of the methods available to them in order to resolve their disagreements and to restore harmony and good relations between them. That is particularly true as regards disputes that are likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, to which the whole Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter is devoted. I would recall that under Article 36, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council may recommend to the parties to refer a legal dispute to the International Court of Justice.

(*spoke in English*)

Bringing a dispute before the Court usually contributes to defusing tensions between States, in particular in situations of competing claims to sovereignty or maritime zones. If the parties are unable to resolve such matters through negotiation to their satisfaction or to find a creative solution, such as joint management and exploitation regimes, the Court remains available to assist them by adjudicating the dispute on the strength of their legal arguments and evidence in accordance with international law.

The international community now has over 90 years of experience with the judicial settlement of disputes. The key role in that regard was assigned by the Charter to the International Court of Justice, which is one of the six main organs of the Organization and its principal judicial organ. Through its activities, the Court is an important agent for upholding and promoting the rule of law at the international level in relations between States. It has the important and noble role of determining existing law and rendering justice between States.

There were periods when States more frequently referred their disputes to it; there were also periods, in particular in the 1960s and 1970s, when judges were sitting rather idly in the Peace Palace. I am glad to report that, over the past two decades, we have witnessed a renewed willingness of States from all corners of the world to submit cases to the Court for adjudication. In the last 22 years of its activities, since 1990, the Court has rendered more judgements than during the first 44 years of its existence — 60 as compared to 52. Just this year, in addition to one advisory opinion, the Court has rendered three judgments and has advanced its work on a fourth, and is planning to hold hearings in two further important cases, one concerning a boundary dispute between two African States and the other regarding a maritime dispute involving two countries from Latin America.

The jurisdiction of the Court is based on the consent of the States involved in a dispute before it. While all 193 States Members of the United Nations are parties to the Statute of the Court, only 67 of them have made a declaration under Article 36, paragraph 2, of the Statute recognizing as compulsory ipso facto and without special agreement, in relation to any another State accepting the same obligation, the jurisdiction of the Court in all legal disputes. Therefore, just slightly more than one third of the States Members of the United Nations have such a declaration in force, which is no reason to be satisfied. In fact, we are far from realizing the hope, Mr. President, which your most distant predecessor, the President of the General Assembly at its very first session, Mr. Paul-Henri Spaak, expressed on 18 April 1946 when he represented the Assembly at the solemn inaugural sitting of the then newly established Court. He wished that one day the Court's jurisdiction would become compulsory for all countries and for all disputes without exception.

In the early years of the United Nations, there was stronger adherence to the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court than what we see today. In 1948, out of 58

States Members of the United Nations, 34, including four out of the five permanent members of the Security Council, recognized the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court, or some 59 per cent of the United Nations membership at that time, as compared to today's rate of 34 per cent, or 67 States, including only one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, out of 193 Member States. I therefore welcome and commend the decision of the Secretary-General to launch a campaign to increase the number of Member States that accept as compulsory the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

On behalf of the Court, I wish to reassure Member States that the Court will continue in its efforts to adjudicate disputes that may be submitted to it in the future with dedication, the utmost impartiality, independence and, in accordance with international law, within the bounds of the jurisdiction conferred upon it. Hopefully, the Court will have further opportunities to contribute, through its activities, to the strengthening of the rule of law at the international level.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Guido Westerwelle, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and current President of the Security Council.

Mr. Westerwelle (President of the Security Council): It is an honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Security Council at its first-ever plenary meeting devoted exclusively to the rule of law. Today's meeting and the representation of States at the highest level attests to the international community's firm commitment to the rule of law. Let me therefore pay tribute to the General Assembly, which has set the normative framework on which we all base our common efforts, and express the Council's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his activities in promoting both the peaceful settlement of disputes and the rule of law.

Today, the rule of law is an important concept in the work of the Security Council. Since 2003, the Council has held several thematic debates on the rule of law in the context of international peace and security, and several presidential statements have recognized the crucial relevance of the rule of law across the full spectrum of the Council's agenda. Thematic and country-specific resolutions adopted by the Council since 2003 have regularly addressed issues related to the rule of law, both in its international and national dimensions.

As a principal organ of the United Nations, the Security Council remains firmly committed to the Charter of the United Nations and international law as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world. The Council attaches vital importance to universal adherence to, and the implementation of, the rule of law. The promotion of justice and the rule of law are essential for peace, the prevention of armed conflict and cooperation among States. The Council is convinced that international law plays a critical role in fostering stability and order in international relations. International law also provides a framework for addressing common challenges, and thereby contributes to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Security Council is committed to, and actively supports, the peaceful settlement of disputes. It has consistently called upon Member States to settle their disputes by peaceful means, as set forth in Chapter VI of the Charter.

The International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, plays a key role in adjudicating disputes among States. Let me therefore call upon all States that have not yet done so to consider accepting the jurisdiction of the Court, in accordance with its Statute.

Sustainable peace requires an integrated and coherent approach. In that regard, the rule of law is one of the key elements of conflict prevention and peacekeeping, as well as of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. That is why the Security Council has included support for the rule of law in the mandates of many peacekeeping and special political missions worldwide.

The Security Council is committed to ensure that all United Nations efforts to restore peace and security themselves respect and promote the rule of law. Especially after the end of peacekeeping and other relevant missions, a coordinated approach among all parts of the United Nations system must include capacity-building support to assist national authorities to uphold the rule of law. In that context, the Council has recognized the importance of national ownership in rule-of-law assistance activities, including the strengthening of accessible and responsive justice and security institutions.

The Security Council remains strongly opposed to impunity for serious violations of international

humanitarian law and human rights law. States must therefore comply with their relevant obligations to end impunity. They must thoroughly investigate and prosecute persons who are responsible for crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. Those who are responsible for sexual or other violations against women and girls must be held accountable. It is only through those means that violations can be prevented, their recurrence be avoided and sustainable peace, justice, truth and reconciliation be achieved.

The Council has repeatedly noted the contributions of the International Criminal Court, ad hoc and mixed tribunals, and chambers of international tribunals to the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of concern to the international community. And it has reiterated the importance of State cooperation with those Courts and tribunals in accordance with States' respective obligations.

The Security Council has expressed concern about the threat posed by transnational organized crime and drug trafficking to international security in different regions of the world. It has called for coordinated action by the United Nations and its States Members to fight those threats by implementing national and international applicable norms through long-term capacity-building efforts and regional initiatives.

Sanctions remain an important tool in the maintenance and restoration of international peace and security. The Council has stressed the need to ensure that sanctions are carefully targeted in support of clear objectives, and designed carefully so as to minimize possible and worst consequences and to ensure that they be implemented by Member States. The Council is committed to fair and clear procedures for placing individuals and entities on sanctions lists and for removing them, as well as for granting humanitarian exemptions.

Today's debate represents a milestone in the promotion of the rule of law through the United Nations. The Security Council remains fully committed to contributing its share to strengthening the rule of law at both the national and international levels. Both are inherently linked, for every nation that proclaims the rule of law at home must respect it abroad and every nation that insists on it abroad must enforce it at home.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Ms. Pillay (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights): The rule of law constitutes the backbone for the legal protection of human rights. In addition, the rule of law itself must be grounded in human rights. Growing up in South Africa, I experienced how the apartheid regime created a veneer of a rule of law based on legislation that institutionalized injustice and procedures that embodied unfairness. My experience has shown me that rule of law without human rights is only an empty shell.

My Office, including through its 58 field presences, works with national stakeholders in building strong and responsive institutions that constitute prerequisites for any legitimate and effective system of governance based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. We also support the establishment and functioning of comprehensive accountability frameworks to address human rights violations, including transitional justice mechanisms that comply with international standards and norms.

Based on our experience in the field, I cannot stress enough the importance of national ownership of rule-of-law principles. National action as well as international support to strengthen the rule of law on the ground must be based on the body of international human rights law developed mainly under the auspices of the United Nations. The International Court of Justice has contributed to national ownership of that body of law through its jurisprudence that sheds light on the scope of States' legal obligations deriving from international human rights instruments. Further clarification of those obligations is provided by treaty bodies and special procedures of the Human Rights Council, both of which are supported by my Office.

In that context, I urge States to use the opportunity of the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels to commit, if they have not yet done so, to becoming a party to all international human rights treaties, withdrawing remaining reservations and accepting the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and treaty body individual complaints procedures.

Respect for the rule of law also demands full compliance with the principles of equality before the law, equal protection of the law and the prohibition

of discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. States must examine their laws and repeal those that are discriminatory in their intent or effect.

In addition, respect for the rule of law requires putting in place effective accountability mechanisms for human rights violations. No one is above the law. Combating impunity requires that international crimes and other gross human rights violations must not be subject to amnesties or functional immunities. I urge States to ensure accountability, notably by ratifying the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and to ensure strong domestic judicial systems to properly implement the principle of complementarity pursuant to the ICC.

Accountability, however, must extend beyond the criminal law realm to include responsive civil and administrative policies and procedures to address grievances and, when required, effective vetting processes. Also, we must ensure respect for victims' rights to effective remedies and reparations for human rights violations.

In that regard, special consideration must be given to the groups most affected, especially those too often excluded, such as victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Furthermore, the right to access justice and legal aid should be respected and ensured. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in empowering people. States should strengthen their support to them and make sure that everyone can enjoy the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Allow me to conclude by saying that the rule of law is best served when all individuals are empowered to claim their rights.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Helen Clark, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

Ms. Clark (United Nations Development Programme): The rule of law underpins achieving the mission of the United Nations: to advance peace, human rights and development. In our rapidly changing, unequal and, at times, dangerous world, implementing the rule of law is critical to establishing the justice, stability and inclusive growth required for sustained human development and poverty eradication. It is therefore highly appropriate that the General Assembly has dedicated a special high-level meeting to the rule of law.

In the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) around the world, we witness how fundamental the rule of law is to the quality of people's lives and to the success of national development efforts. Where laws protect women from violence and discrimination, providing a basis for full empowerment and equality, their lives are immeasurably improved. In places where poor and marginalized citizens know their rights and can have wrongs redressed, there is less discrimination, fewer human rights abuses and more effective service delivery. Where citizens overall are free from the debilitating fear of violence or intimidation, strategies for inclusive growth and the other components of sustainable human development can flourish.

The rule of law is therefore at the very heart of what is needed to advance human development. Conversely, shortcomings in the rule of law underlie the exclusion, suffering and poverty of many people. It is not surprising that governing institutions that do not enable the rule of law become a target of citizen grievances. UNDP welcomes the call of Member States in the declaration just adopted at this meeting (resolution 67/1) to consider the links between the rule of law, sustainable development, poverty reduction and human rights in the context of a post-2015 global development agenda.

In response to the requests of Member States, UNDP works on rule-of-law-related programmes in more than 100 countries. We have specifically been working, and continue to work, to strengthen the rule of law in more than 40 countries that have been affected by conflict in the past decade. We work with national institutions to strengthen their ability to enforce and implement the law in a fair, effective and inclusive manner. We also work with the citizenry to expand access to justice and to empower individuals to make effective use of the law.

Establishing and strengthening the rule of law is a long-term endeavour. It requires sustained and proactive partnerships and investment. Short-term responses will result in failure. Efforts to strengthen justice and security systems and to legally empower the poor need to be embedded in national development planning and policy. We hope that Member States will agree to work in partnership and to support nationally led processes

to strengthen the rule of law. We see inspiration in the impressive strides made by so many nations that have made the rule of law a national priority.

We will play our part. We have heard the call of Member States for greater coherence in United Nations rule of law work. UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations combine efforts as cluster leads of United Nations efforts to strengthen justice, police and corrections rule-of-law assistance in post-conflict and crisis contexts. Drawing on the skills of the entire United Nations system and other stakeholders, we aim to rapidly respond to country needs in a well-coordinated way.

We look forward to working with Member States on development approaches to securing the benefits of the rule of law both now and through the post-2015 global development agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Yuri Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

Mr. Fedotov (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime): I am grateful for this opportunity to add my voice to those of the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, as well as my colleagues Helen Clark and Navi Pillay, in support of the rule of law as a central building block at the national and international levels. The declaration just adopted (resolution 67/1) provides a solid road map in that direction.

In a globalized world, illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime represent a growing challenge to the rule of law and good governance. Once, such billion-dollar industries were a problem primarily for law enforcement and for national authorities. Today, they have grown in ambition, scale and sophistication.

The link between the rule of law and its role in improving stability is indisputable. Over the past 10 years, violent crime has decreased in countries where the rule of law has been improved. The rule of law, development and security are therefore interdependent and keystone elements of the United Nations mandate under the Charter. For example, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 agenda are essential to the lives of millions of people in order to underpin the rule of law and to ensure access to justice, in particular.

In recent years, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has witnessed a large increase in the need for technical assistance under our justice programme. Our country and regional programmes undertake a wide range of practical activities, including police reform, strengthening prosecution services and access to legal aid, as well as human rights and justice for children, among many other areas. The approach rests on creating inter-agency relationships and other partnerships, while working through integrated regional programmes and delivering technical assistance at the grass-roots level. As the United Nations office specifically mandated to promote the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols and the United Nations Convention against Corruption, we need to assist Member States in the full implementation of those legal instruments.

In the area of counter-terrorism, UNODC views respect for the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights as the core of efforts to fight terrorism. However, if we are to make inroads into such multiple threats, our strategy must be aimed at both the international and the local levels simultaneously. The local strategy must be connected to the global. We also need to develop a collective vision of what the criminal justice system in the early twenty-first century looks like.

UNODC believes that such a system must be informed by the highest international standards and delivering fair, effective and humane criminal justice policies. Today's meeting is another step forward in ensuring that we continue to uphold that universal benchmark.

The President: We will now continue the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels.

Before we begin with the list of speakers, I would like to turn to some organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting.

The list of speakers was established on the understanding that statements will have a time limit of up to five minutes per statement. In the light of that given time frame, I would like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpretation may be provided properly.

To assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speaker's rostrum.

May I appeal to all speakers for their cooperation in observing the time limits of their statements, so that all those inscribed on the list of speakers for a given meeting will be heard at that meeting.

Finally, in order to avoid disruption for the next speaker, I would like to seek the cooperation of representatives, who should remain in their seats after a statement has been delivered.

The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Boni Yayi, President of the Republic of Benin.

President Yayi (*spoke in French*): The organization of this High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels is an excellent initiative. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/66/749) on the matter, which was indeed edifying.

In and of itself, the rule of law represents the optimal framework for the functioning of democracy. It is up to States to define the shape of it and to put in place sound institutions that are credible and stable enough to support democracy. The United Nations has a vocation to help States in that endeavour by providing the necessary know-how as needed.

The debate on democratic formalism and the daily practice of the rule of law remain at the very heart of the issue before us. Formal democracy can make it possible for a leader who does not subscribe to the values of the rule of law to accede to power. In doing so, such leaders become the very ones to dig its grave. The formal principle of the separation of powers is not always an operational concept when the actors behind institutions that exercise powers are not imbued with the highest ethical, and even spiritual, values and confirmed moral rectitude.

The very foundation of the rule of law is therefore equitable justice whereby actors are endowed with irreproachable professional ethics. Corruption of the judiciary thus becomes one of the main impediments to entrenching the rule of law in that the feeling of injustice becomes a source of social disorder and institutional political instability.

For ordinary citizens, particularly in young democracies, the prevailing tendency is to believe that they have no rights and no obligations vis-à-vis the community to which they belong — nothing but rights, without obligations.

Those ominous trends call upon us to work to teach the culture of democracy and the rule of law so that their progress cannot be reversed. That must include fighting corruption, the lack of civic mindedness, disorder, anarchy, poor institutional governance and the ensuing impunity.

Against that backdrop, over the past two decades Benin has made considerable progress in the areas of electoral governance, the protection of human rights and the establishment of stable institutions. However, there are still many challenges before us, especially in the area of respect for the principles of professional and social ethics that are compatible with the requirements of the rule of law and the supremacy of institutions above and beyond the people running them.

Benin fully adheres to the fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter as the basis for the relations between States and for the mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. This premise provides us with a sound basis for global peacebuilding, which must be the ultimate purpose of the rule of law at the international level.

In that regard, everything must be done to make the collective security system established by the international community more credible. Equality among States, regardless of their size or power, must be a cardinal principle guiding international relations. No State must be above international law. Moreover, we must not accept that, under the cover of international law, interference in the internal affairs of other States is justified. We must work together towards a better world, where there is concerted governance and where the law is not discriminatory and the conditions for enjoying fundamental rights are recognized by all and for all.

That collective aspiration requires reform at the level of world governance, including reform of the Security Council, and the re-establishment of equity in international economic relations, which must include the elimination of abject poverty and promoting the right to development.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Demetris Christofias, President of the Republic of Cyprus.

President Christofias: Today's meeting is being held against the backdrop of the recent worrying developments in the world and massive abuses of human rights.

The rule of law is a fundamental principle upon which the European Union (EU) is based. As the country currently holding the rotating presidency of the Union, I would like to highlight that this is a guiding principle of all EU member States, in both their internal and external action. The EU's position will be presented later by Mr. Barroso, President of the European Commission.

Lack of respect for the rule of law leads to bad governance, civil unrest and political instability, with serious security implications at both the national and international levels. It is crucial, therefore, that we all focus our efforts on the universal promotion of the rule of law and the strict monitoring of its application. That is an enormous challenge for both the United Nations and its States Members. It requires close cooperation among the United Nations, regional actors, Member States and non-State actors for the constant exchange of relevant data and other useful information, in order to allow for the close monitoring of areas of crisis and early coordination for the purpose of conflict prevention.

The Republic of Cyprus, having fully subscribed to the pledges made by the European Union and its member States, commits itself to reinforcing the rule of law through national policy and to upholding the Charter of the United Nations, in order to strengthen the main pillars of the Organization's work: peace and security, human rights and development.

At the national level, Cyprus retains constitutionally a separation of powers, ensuring the independence of the judiciary and access to justice for all. Cyprus is fully committed to the protection of human rights and gender equality. In the context of the labour market it has been the goal of consecutive Governments of Cyprus for gender equality to be incorporated into the social and economic policy of the State.

Cyprus acknowledges that the fight against impunity concerns all of us. It is a stepping stone in establishing the rule of law in post-conflict societies. The International Criminal Court is the competent institution to fight impunity in the world, and we welcome the increased participation in the Rome Statute. At the same time, Cyprus, pursuant to the complementarity principle of the Statute, has incorporated into its national penal code crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, which are punishable with life imprisonment. Cyprus has also initiated the internal process for the amendments to the Rome Statute with regard to the crime of aggression, adopted in 2010 at the Review Conference of the Rome Statute in Kampala.

The international community is sending a strong message today by organizing this first high-level meeting on the rule of law. Most important, the adoption of the Political Declaration (resolution 67/1) demonstrates the international community's commitment and paves the way for the future.

In a divided world, the concept of the rule of law is one of the greatest unifying factors, perhaps the greatest, the nearest we are likely to come to a universal principle.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia.

President Ilves: At the 2005 World Summit here at the United Nations, States agreed on the need for universal adherence to, and the implementation of, the rule of law, at both the international and the national levels. We must commit to common values and deepen discussion and action on that principle: governance that ensures justice and fairness in which all persons, including the State itself are accountable; where laws are promulgated publicly, enforced equally and adjudicated independently.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/66/749), which is the basis for discussions on the declaration (resolution 67/1) we adopted today. The rule of law is a guarantee for the full range of human rights. The United Nations as the advocate and protector of the global system of human rights must continue to improve tools to prevent human rights violations.

The United Nations Human Rights Council is one of the bodies with the essential function to respond and draw attention to situations that might give rise to serious human rights violations. Estonia looks forward to becoming a member of the Council and to working proactively towards the fulfilment of its mandate. Our primary concerns on the Council will be, inter alia, advancing the rights of women, gender equality, the rights of the child and of indigenous peoples. We would work on promoting global Internet freedom and closing the impunity gap for the most serious international crimes.

I am glad that the Secretary-General has entitled his report "Delivering justice: programme of action to strengthen the rule of law at the national and

international levels", and that has devoted a section to establishing the age of accountability. Justice, whether delivered by domestic or international institutions, is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable development and security.

Impunity provides fertile ground for the recurrence of conflicts, and it breeds instability. Recent milestones in international criminal law are important steps in building trust in international politics: Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, the former warlord of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was the first person convicted by the International Criminal Court; Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia, was found guilty by the Special Court for Sierra Leone; and none of those indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia are free, and many have been convicted. Those examples, as well as the fact that the most serious international crimes have no statute of limitations, illustrate the waning of the idea that leaders can be immune from prosecution.

As it celebrates its tenth anniversary, the International Criminal Court enjoys increased international trust. An impressive number of 121 countries — six short of two thirds of the States Members of the United Nations — have already ratified the Rome Statute. I call upon all countries that have not yet done so to join the Rome Statute and to cooperate with the Court. Ratifying the amendments to the Rome Statute on the crime of aggression adopted in Kampala is crucial. Estonia pledges to ratify those amendments, and we call on others to do the same. That would confirm our commitment to the rule of law and international criminal justice, and to the International Criminal Court in particular.

The rule of law is not only about bringing criminals to justice. The concept's importance is that it touches all of society. It is essential also for entrepreneurs, companies and foreign investors. More than 20 years have passed since Estonia restored its independence and market economy. Over those years we have set roots for the principles of good governance, along with broadening the use of information technology. The e-government cabinet, e-health, online voting and online pre-filled tax returns are not only examples of Estonian innovation but also examples of citizen-friendly public services that increase transparency and help prevent corruption. Our experience shows that open markets operating in a predictable legal environment provide the preconditions for rapid and sustainable economic recovery and growth.

The effective participation of all stakeholders in public affairs is an important way to further the rule of law. Every person must have the possibility to improve and influence his community life. In Estonia participation is enhanced through the use of information technology. To enable politicians and non-governmental organizations, indeed every man and woman, to express himself or herself, we must maintain open access to the Internet. Additionally, civil society's contribution is vital to advancing the rule of law worldwide. I hope that future conversations on the rule of law here at the United Nations will be widened, and adherence to it broadened.

If we respect the international commitments we have made, the world would certainly be a better place. Estonia welcomes the possibility of making rule-of-law-related pledges. We have presented our pledges to the Secretariat and commend those who have done the same.

The President: The Assembly will how hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Porfirio Lobo Sosa, President of the Republic of Honduras.

President Lobo Sosa (*spoke in Spanish*): The peoples of the United Nations recognized, from the very founding of the Organization, that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that, endowed as they are with reason and awareness, they should therefore behave in a fraternal manner towards one another. We are thus resolved to create the conditions necessary for the maintenance of justice and the respect of obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law, and to practise tolerance and live in peace like good neighbours.

As the Secretary-General said it so well, the concept of the rule of law is at the heart of the work of the United Nations. There is an interdependent relationship between the rule of law and development: the rule of law promotes development, and development strengthens the rule of law.

We in Honduras have made progress on a number of different fronts with a view to promoting and strengthening the application of the law to all citizens without distinction, thereby ensuring that justice is done in a timely and impartial manner.

I would like to share with the Assembly the fact that in my country there is no immunity for any public official or civil servant; we all are equal before the law. Moreover, Supreme Court of Justice magistrates are elected with the broad participation of civil society in order to strengthen their independence from political and economic influences. We have also created a national judiciary council so as to provide guarantees in terms of the professionalization and careers of our judges and magistrates.

Our Constitution furthermore states that an annual percentage of the national budget will be earmarked for the Supreme Court of Justice. Honduras plans to broaden the scope of alternate mechanisms for the settlement of disputes and the strengthening of the rule of law. We are currently in the midst of an intensive process aimed at reforming the national police on the basis of three major objectives: to purge it; professionalize it; and then provide it with the technical, technological and logistical resources necessary for it to fulfil its mandate.

At the international level, Honduras's membership in the United Nations has meant not only that it is subject to its norms but also that it has always had recourse to mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes in resolving its differences with other States. We have accepted the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, and we have also accepted the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. We have complied with the decisions of the Commission and with the rulings handed down by the Court.

In the international trade arena, we also accept the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization and have turned to it to resolve trade disputes. Likewise, we have introduced mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of trade disputes in the context of the free-trade agreements to which we have adhered.

Honduras is currently facing a tremendous problem in continuing to strengthen the rule of law owing to the harmful effects of drug trafficking as a result of our geographical location, between producers and consumers of drugs.

I should like to conclude by responding to the invitation made by the General Assembly in resolution 66/102 and proposing a sub-theme for debate by the Sixth Committee: "The culture of the respect of law", or "The culture of legality". We believe that the rule of law cannot be reduced simply to a legal body of work nor to the actions taken by our States to ensure that the rule of law prevails. In other words, for the rule of law to prevail, it is not enough just to have laws, police, prosecutors and judges, nor is it even enough for them to carry out their work. What is necessary is a change in society's values. Society needs to be aware of and united by the rule of law, and to protect opportunities for the development and well-being of the human person. It is not possible to have a State based on the rule of law or functioning, stable and permanent democratic institutions in the absence of such a culture.

That is therefore the task of society as a whole, including teachers in schools, colleges and universities; the media; and so-called centres of moral authority, such as the family, churches, citizens' groups and persons of renown, at the national, regional and local levels.

We hope that, during this session, we will see a commitment to continuing to strengthen the rule of law through the promotion by all States Members of the culture of respect for legality.

The President: The Assembly will how hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria.

President Fischer: I am very happy that the General Assembly has chosen this important issue as the subject of this High-level Meeting.

International law and the rule of law are the foundations of the international system. Austria strongly believes that a rules-based international system, with clear and practicable regulation, is an essential precondition for lasting peace, security and economic development.

This High-level Meeting provides an excellent opportunity to renew the commitment of all States Members of the United Nations to the rule of law at the national and international levels. We would suggest the convening of meetings of this kind at periodic intervals in future.

Today I will focus my statement on the links between the rule of law and sustainable economic development, the protection of human rights and the maintenance of international peace and stability.

First, the rule of law and sustainable economic development go hand in hand and are mutually reinforcing. Our own history after the Second World

War and the recent history of the neighbouring countries of Eastern Europe give evidence of that.

Most importantly, the challenge of corruption must be addressed. At the side event jointly organized by Austria, Tunisia, Japan and Estonia, to take place at lunchtime today, we want to focus on this exact aspect. The International Anti-Corruption Academy, based in Austria, provides anti-corruption education and professional training as well as technical assistance. It has more than 30 members, and we invite other States to join.

Secondly, we are pleased to see that the Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, adopted today, prominently refers to the interdependence between the rule of law and the protection of human rights. We should therefore intensify our efforts towards the universalization of international human rights treaties.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Human Rights Council's special procedures and the human rights treaty bodies are indispensable to the realization of the rule of law in practice.

Freedom of expression is essential in building democratic societies based on the rule of law. Journalists play a crucial role in the process. In order to respond to the worrying trend of increased attacks against journalists worldwide, Austria has placed the safety of journalists high on its human rights agenda. It is a priority for our membership in the Human Rights Council.

Thirdly, with regard to the rule of law and the maintenance of international peace and security, we call upon all Member States to actively promote an international order based on the rule of law and international law, with the United Nations at its core. Accountability and the fight against impunity for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are crucial. We cannot turn a blind eye to mass killings of innocent civilians, as we are currently witnessing in Syria. We must stop the atrocities and ensure that the perpetrators and those ordering the crimes are brought to justice. However, the referral of a situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) is only the starting point towards justice. The ICC cannot fulfil its mandate without political and material support and cooperation by Member States. We also believe that our efforts to promote the rule of law should focus more on prevention. We need to be better prepared to assist States in their reform efforts prior to the outbreak of conflict.

Today's High-level Meeting should not be seen as a one-time event. The momentum should be maintained for follow-up and further action. We welcome the numerous pledges made today and are proud to announce that Austria has also made a number of pledges, which are annexed to my written statement. Our efforts to promote the rule of law do not serve an abstract goal, but rather the protection of the rights and interests of individuals. We will continue to give the utmost priority to the subject, in order to live in a society in which the rule of law prevails both internationally and nationally.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

President Ahmadinejad (*spoke in Farsi; interpretation provided by the delegation*): The theme of this meeting is vitally important and the main foundation of all other issues. Regulating sound social relations, establishing order, justice, freedom, peace and sustainable security, prosperity and public welfare, and securing the rights of the public are dependent upon the absolute rule of law, and its various aspects need to be taken into consideration.

First, lawmaking is a sacred task and God, who is the most righteous and the wisest, is a lawmaker himself. The nature of law should be just and based on wisdom. The law should be all-inclusive, embracing various aspects and the legitimate interests of all, and an effective tool to rein in lawbreakers. The law should secure and protect liberty, dignity and basic human rights, regulate and facilitate activities and support society's development. It must be transparent, current and not subject to arbitrary interpretation.

Second, legislators should genuinely represent people and support only those decisions that represent the actual will of the people in a free, equal and just manner.

Third, law enforcement authorities must be conscientious, trustworthy, efficient, fair, dedicated, self-motivated, impartial and defenders of the rights of the general public. Even the best laws cannot deliver their desired results if they are not implemented correctly or if they are manipulated by corrupted elements.

Fourth, the law should be enforced correctly and fairly, and should of course be based on knowledge and prudence.

Fifth, the law needs to be enacted in such a way that people see it as fair, and in line with their interests and those of their society. They must believe in it in order for them to contribute constructively to its implementation. Law enforcement officials should enjoy legitimacy and the trust of the people.

Sixth, laws that breed discrimination among people and nations receive neither recognition nor legitimacy. The law must be implemented with equal rights and obligations for all. The discriminatory privilege of the right of veto enjoyed by some members of the Security Council lacks legitimacy, and that is why the Security Council has failed to establish justice and ensure sustainable peace and security in the world. We have witnessed that some members of the Security Council with the right of veto have chosen silence with regard to the nuclear warheads of a fake regime, while at the same time they impede the scientific progress of other nations. They themselves wrongly invoke the United Nations Charter and misuse freedom of speech to justify their silence towards offending the sanctity of the human community and the divine prophets. They support those offenders, infringe upon others' freedom and allow sacrilege to people's beliefs and sanctity while they criminalize posing questions or investigating historical issues and put researchers in jail.

Seventh, in the name of freedom and maintaining international security, they violate the basic rights and freedoms of other nations while imposing their own will on them.

Eighth, legislators and law enforcement officials should not be influenced or dominated by particular parties, groups or centres of power.

I would like to make the following proposals for better and more effective rule of law in international relations.

First, the General Assembly, as the highest organ of the United Nations, must restore its real position as a manifestation of the universal joint governance of the world by its immediate revitalization.

Second, measures must be taken, in the interests of Member States and with due regard to justice, to completely reform and change the rules and regulations governing the Security Council, in terms of both its powers and its structures.

Third, the principles of justice and fairness as accepted in today's world must be maintained in the making and implementation of laws.

Fourth, the international community must be united in holding occupying Powers to account and in making efforts to return occupied territories to their rightful owners and to restore those nations' rights.

Fifth, the prohibition of the use or threat of the use of force in international relations, along with the peaceful settlement of disputes, must be the foundation of the rule of law at the international level.

Sixth, the principle of the equal sovereignty of all States must be respected. All States must enjoy equal opportunities for participation in global governance, setting standards and making decisions.

Seventh, all States should adhere to their international obligations under international treaties and international law in a consistent manner.

Eighth, States are urged to refuse to yield to the imposition of laws by bullying countries.

Ninth, the legitimate and legal rights of States and nations must be respected.

Tenth, divine prophets and divinely inspired religions, which are the common heritage of humankind, should be respected by the law in every society in order to avoid conflicts that lead to hatred, war and hostility and to promote peace and integration among peoples.

On behalf of the people of Iran, I would like to express my readiness to cooperate in fulfilling those goals. I hope that with the concerted efforts of all, we will witness the ascendancy of just laws emanating from the free and equal will of nations and the attainment of peace and sustainable security around the world. Achieving those desires will unquestionably pave the way for the establishment of justice in the world under the rule of the righteous and ultimate saviour of humankind, Imam Al-Mahdi.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Andreas Bērziņš, President of the Republic of Latvia.

President Bērziņš: Latvia is strongly committed to strengthening the rule of law, democracy, human rights and good governance around the world. That

commitment is based on our own experience. More than 70 years ago, Latvia and the other two Baltic States were eliminated from the world political map owing to the collapse of an international system based on the rule of law. Two totalitarian regimes, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, divided Europe, violating international law and ignoring the sovereign will of free countries.

Latvia restored its independence only 21 years ago. From being a Soviet-occupied country, Latvia re-emerged as a reliable member of the international system, represented in the United Nations, the European Union and NATO. Out of a closed and regulated system we have developed an open, liberal, fast-growing market economy. A totalitarian regime with an oppressed people has been replaced by stable democratic institutions and an open society where human rights are respected.

The key to Latvia's success has been in establishing the principles of justice, the rule of law and democracy, and in putting them into practice. We also follow those principles in our international relations, making our contribution to strengthening the rule of law around the world. For example, Latvia is helping Georgia set up an effective system of supervision over the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, and we are helping Moldova reform its justice sector.

Our history proves that a strong, multilateral, inclusive international order based on the rule of law is essential for maintaining global peace and security. The United Nations plays an important role in this, and its Member States are committed to implementing the principles contained in the Charter. We believe that a comprehensive approach to addressing rule-of-law issues is needed. International commitments, national implementation, monitoring and better cooperation and coordination among international actors in assisting States can contribute to worldwide respect for the rule of law.

The voluntary pledges made by Member States at this meeting are our first concrete steps towards reaffirming our political commitment to the rule of law and moving this agenda forward. In that context, Latvia now makes the following pledges.

First, we will provide assistance to other countries in the area of reform of the judicial sector and in strengthening the rule of law.

Secondly, in order to improve access to justice by reducing and balancing the workload of its courts, the Republic of Latvia will gradually introduce mediation by the year 2015, thereby facilitating out-of-court dispute resolution where appropriate.

Thirdly, within the next year, Latvia will take steps to join Freedom Online: Joint Action for Free Expression on the Internet, as we strongly support the right to freedom of expression and to freedom of the media, as compatible with a democratic form of governance. We also wish to see the advancement and protection of those rights on the Internet.

Latvia also stands committed to gender equality, the promotion of women's rights and women's participation and inclusion in governmental and political processes. Ending violence and preventing discrimination against women, as well as addressing women's justice and security concerns around the world, are part of strengthening the rule of law internationally.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is the only permanent international court entrusted with prosecuting the gravest crimes against humanity. It plays an important role in closing the accountability gap and in promoting international justice, peace and security. As a long-term supporter of the ICC, Latvia believes that the Court should receive the full cooperation and support of United Nations States Members.

Finally, I would like to wish you, Mr. President, and all of us an effective and comprehensive follow-up to this high-level event and its continued existence on the future agenda of the United Nations.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Sauli Niinistö, the President of the Republic of Finland.

President Niinistö: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Finland.

We express our sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for his welcome vision on how the rule of law should be developed at the national and international levels. Respect for the rule of law is critical for the main pillars of the United Nations, that is, international peace and security, human rights and development.

The rule of law requires a comprehensive approach. We fully support the Secretary-General's efforts to integrate the rule of law in all activities of the United

Nations, and we commend the work that the United Nations does to assist Member States to strengthen the rule of law.

The rule of law is a core principle whose main components are legality, equality, accountability and participation. The Nordic countries reaffirm our strong commitment to those principles. Those who are disadvantaged, marginalized or vulnerable deserve our particular attention.

Women and men have an equal right to participate in decision-making, institutions of governance and justice. Legislation should be amended, and institutions reformed, to ensure the realization of human rights and to guarantee everyone a life free from discrimination and violence.

The International Court of Justice is central to upholding the rule of law. It is our firm belief that the Court is an underused tool for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. We call on Member States that have not yet done so to consider accepting the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court, in accordance with the Rome Statute.

Impunity cannot be tolerated. In its 10 years of existence, the International Criminal Court has become a major actor in fighting impunity for the most serious international crimes. The Nordic countries are committed to promoting the universal ratification and effective implementation of the Rome Statute. That includes the principle of complementarity and full cooperation with the Court. We call upon all Member States to accede to the Statute.

Attention must also be paid to victims. The Rome Statute system, which includes the Trust Fund for Victims, has an important restorative function.

We join the Secretary-General in calling on all Member States to grant all individuals their full right to association and assembly. We should support civil society organizations and give them the necessary legislative and political space to thrive.

Civil society plays an important role in advancing the rule of law. It is the bearer of ideas, the provider of assistance, technical expertise and information, and the facilitator of dialogue. We should make sure that the follow-up to this process continues in close cooperation with civil society.

Today's High-level Meeting marks the beginning of a new phase in strengthening the rule of law. We have adopted an outcome document (resolution 67/1) that will guide us in our future work. This is an agenda for peace. This is an agenda for sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

What we need now is concrete action to convert our political will into benefits on the ground. The Nordic countries welcome recent initiatives in the United Nations to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of the rule of law work. We encourage the United Nations to further those efforts. We also welcome the idea of pledges. Today we commit ourselves to several initiatives.

We firmly believe that a strong rule-of-law perspective should be included in the post-2015 international development agenda. We hope that we can one day agree on a set of rule-of-law goals to better prioritize our action.

Our future agenda of the rule of law is broad and cross-cutting. We look forward to cooperating with all Member States.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Rosen Plevneliev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria.

President Plevnieliev: Bulgaria subscribes to the statement that will be made later by President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso on behalf of the European Union, as well as to the joint pledges undertaken by European Union (EU) member States on the occasion of this High-level Meeting.

Along with the other European members, my country is a strong proponent of the rule of law as the foundation of a predictable and just international system and as the best strategy for the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prevention of conflicts. It is the duty of the United Nations and its States Members to uphold the rule of law in all their activities and to continue to improve their performance at the national and international levels. In that regard, we welcome the report (A/66/749) and the programme of action presented by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Over the past two decades Bulgaria has adopted the highest international standards in its national legal system. This year, for example, my country acceded to several international legal instruments, such as the 1954 United Nations Convention on the Status of

Stateless Persons, the 1961 United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, as well as to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We are committed to speeding up the work on the process of ratification of the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, of 2006. We also support universal arbitration and the abolition of the death penalty.

We believe that it is important to enhance the role of the International Court of Justice in the peaceful settlement of disputes. As one of the original signatories of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, we join the efforts to strengthen the international system for delivering criminal justice. The United Nations must be at the forefront of the fight against impunity and crimes against humanity. Based on recent testimonies of brutal acts of violence and massacres committed by the regime in Damascus against its own people, Bulgaria has supported the proposal for referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Delivering justice is vital for addressing the scourge of terrorism, one of the ugliest crimes against humanity. The recent attack on our soil made us stronger and more determined. Bulgaria has adhered to 15 international conventions and protocols related to the fight against international terrorism and looks forward to the adoption of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are core values of the United Nations.

The leading international human rights bodies, such as the Human Rights Council, should remain central in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, monitoring implementation of commitments and fostering international cooperation in that area.

As a clear demonstration of our commitment to the cause of human rights, Bulgaria has for the first time presented its candidature to the Human Rights Council for the period 2019-2021. Although we have extensive achievements in that area, we view our prospective membership as a challenge and an opportunity to further develop Bulgaria's domestic policies and to apply the highest possible international standards. At the national level, we have made significant progress in streamlining our judicial and law enforcement system, making it more efficient, transparent and accountable to our citizens. The reforms of the judiciary include both new and improved legislation and its implementation. We cooperate with the relevant European and international monitoring institutions and bodies focused on justice and judicial reform.

Bulgaria welcomes resolution 67/1 adopted earlier in today's meeting, which was achieved through complex negotiations. Although the final text does not fully reflect our views on the fundamental link between legality, accountability, democratic governance and human rights, we hope that it will provide a good starting point for future dialogue and cooperation on how best the rule of law should be applied at the national and international levels.

The President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Waheed, President of the Republic of Maldives.

President Waheed: It is a pleasure and an honour to stand before the General Assembly today, representing my nation in advocacy of a principle that we hold dear.

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. Let me also congratulate and thank the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and his co-facilitators from Mexico and Denmark, who assisted him in the formulation of the Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels (resolution 67/1). The principles enshrined in the resolution resonate strongly with the Maldives, and we lend our weight to efforts to achieve the values espoused therein. Allow me also to commend the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his untiring efforts to promote the rule of law around the world.

The rule of law is the foundation of governance. From their inception, societies have had their own set of rules, norms and boundaries that allow them to govern their own lives and their relationship with others. Applied by the governors to the governed, that universal tenet applies to all of us in the family of humanity. The fundamental application of law creates societies and paves the way for civilization, making it thus the litmus test between barbarism and civilization.

That has been true from the first inscription of the law in the Code of Hammurabi, promulgated by the king of Babylon around 1760 B.C., to Immanuel Kant's

philosophy of law, articulated in the eighteenth century, to the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1) which called for the universal adherence to and implementation of the rule of law at both the national and international levels.

The saying that the basis for democracy is the rule of law is upheld only when we build our societies on democratic principles, only when the fundamentals of human rights and minority rights are protected, and only when the smallest and weakest of our citizens feel safe. Despite the near-universal support that the rule of law has gained, it is perhaps worth asking whether the principle has been applied in its true sense. When leaders consider that the law should not be applied to them as much as it is applied to the ruled, then there is no rule of law. When national leaders, responsible for upholding the law, act with impunity, the rule of law fails. The rule of law can exist only when it is measured out equally for the most powerful and the weakest alike.

My tiny nation was one of the first countries in South Asia to adopt a constitution in 1932. In our stride towards development, we have had six constitutions and seven amendments. Yet the legal system in the Maldives is very weak and in need of urgent reforms. In our quest for democracy, we enacted a new constitution four years ago. The 2008 Constitution guarantees the separation of powers, a universal bill of rights and a free media. The judiciary was granted independence, and accountability measures were applied for the first time. It is a constitution that will lead us on our path to democracy and best practices. The dramatic change in the legal, governance, constitutional and administrative systems has subjected the Maldives to many challenges. The objectives set forth in the Constitution require strict adherence to and uncompromising application of the rule of law.

In the face of all of those challenges, my Government remains committed to implementing the Constitution, upholding the rule of law and making it a way of life.

The Maldives is a State party to seven of the nine most important international human rights instruments. The Maldives will formulate a national strategy to strengthen national capacities so as to more effectively comply with those instruments. In addition, my Government is seeking the consent of the parliament to ratify or accede to other critically important international instruments, such as the International Labour Organization's Eight Core Conventions on Fundamental Human Rights, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols Thereto and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Strengthening police accountability is a core component of my Government's commitment to the rule of law. The Government is taking the necessary measures to strengthen the internal review and oversight mechanisms in the Maldives Police Service. We are also taking action to improve the external review and monitoring of law enforcement operations by strengthening the Police Integrity Commission.

National Governments and international organizations alike have a solemn duty to promote the rule of law. The importance of and the need for a code of principles and rules in the international arena are undisputed. International organizations define for us the meaning of the rule of law. They set the benchmarks against which the application of the rule of law is measured, and they prescribe what changes are needed to improve a country's performance with regard to the rule of law.

But let me pause to reflect on whether international organizations subject themselves to the same standards they set for Member States. The recent experience of the Maldives suggests that the answer to the question of whether the weakest of our global family of nations feel safe and secure is no.

Small justice is being served out to a small State. It is regrettable but true that some powerful international actors have publicly instructed the Maldives to take certain measures contradictory to our laws. We were asked to bring a presidential term to an end and hold elections, even though they were not allowed under our Constitution. We were asked in no uncertain terms to abide by such instructions, even if it meant amending the Constitution. We are being asked to withdraw certain criminal cases filed by independent State bodies for crimes as serious as the abduction and detention in isolation of a serving judge by the armed forces. We were told to take those measures for the good of the country.

When we questioned those instructions, we were were labelled an uncooperative State, casting doubt on the country's democratic credentials. We were placed on an international watch list, without due process. Those are clearly punitive measures against a country whose economy is dependent on its image. That label has caused the Maldives to lose significant investments,

external loan financing, and foreign tourist arrivals into the country. It has also encouraged domestic unrest and has choked the country's governance system and crippled our infant democracy.

The world's small States cannot afford to be complacent. Our experience in dealing with the powerful international actors in the past few months has not been pleasant. If Member States do not stand up and draw attention to injustices, any one of them could be next.

The Maldives is the smallest economy in South Asia. Small reductions in tourist arrivals or foreign investments have a significant impact on our economy. Yet, as one of the smallest countries in the world, there is very little we could do politically to counter the pounding that we are subjected to by some international partners. We lack the political and economic might of the larger States to counter the weight of those international players. There is no recourse available for small States like the Maldives. We have not been given a fair hearing or the benefit of the doubt.

We recognize that international organizations play a valuable and indispensable role in promoting the rule of law. Small States, like the Maldives, value their membership in international organizations. We depend on them to protect our interests and values. We expect them to work with us in promoting the rule of law.

We believe that the story of the Maldives needs to be told. It is a lesson to be learned by other small States. The application of the rule of law should protect the smaller and the weaker and prevent small justice from being served to small States.

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea would like to underscore the importance of the topic of the rule of law as a key element in shaping a world of peace, security and the stability of nations. Indeed, the law regulates human behaviour, which is often characterized by self-centredness and ambition. Law provides order based on reason, supported by the customs or habits accepted by a community. The law is the only element that can reconcile the various interests in a given human community. If laws are to be effective, they must be supported by the consensus of all the elements that make up the society that those laws govern, at both the State and the international levels.

With regard to my country, Equatorial Guinea, the rule of law is a principle and ongoing desire for our Government, which seeks continuously to incorporate democratic values into the national judiciary. We attach great importance to the national judiciary in our political system, so much so that the democratic process, which began in 1982, has evolved over time in keeping with our people's culture, culminating in the recent constitutional reform, which grants broad liberties to the people, provides the machinery for checks and balances on Government action and protects human rights. Indeed, the reform stipulates that a leader may not stay in power for more than two terms. It establishes a bicameral Parliament to increase the universal representation of the people. All economic and social decisions are subject to technical criteria and social interest. It establishes an advisory body for the President of the Republic, strengthens the judiciary's independence, creates a body for the oversight of public and private economic activities, and establishes an authority for the monitoring of human rights.

At the international level, despite the considerable amount of legislation that currently makes up the international legal order and despite the disappearance of the Cold War, we note that our world today suffers from great imbalances at the political level, as well as at the economic and sociocultural levels, given the low respect for international law shown by some States, which create anarchy by systematically violating international laws at their own risk.

While we are all headed in the same direction today, we do not believe in the leadership of one State or one group of States that seeks to serve as the police in applying international law and morality. That constitutes a usurpation of United Nations authority and diminishes the effectiveness of the world Organization, which should in and of itself impose its authority in the international arena, thereby preventing any possible manipulation by external pressures brought to bear by such States or groups of States in violation of those norms and laws. To our understanding, the decisions and recommendations adopted by the United Nations are not above the principles and objectives enshrined in its Charter, nor should they violate the international covenants, conventions and agreements that shape the world order. Rather, those decisions and recommendations should lend greater force to the

respect for the law, without resorting to measures that completely ignore the sovereign rights of States.

The spirit of the United Nations is not to create wars; rather it should avoid them, to the extent possible. Humanitarian interference is a laudable idea, yet it should not spill over into violent action, which could lead to shedding the blood of innocent and defenceless people.

It is not possible both to be and to stop being at the same time. The world Organization was created for peace and not for war, as we see happening today. Consequently, internal political processes are within the exclusive jurisdiction of each State, and the United Nations should intervene only to bring reconciliation and peace in the event of armed conflict.

Economically, the world is in a state of continuous imbalance. Political interests always go hand in hand with economic and sociocultural interests.

In that case, the sound decisions of the United Nations to harmonize international trade should not serve as a passport allowing some countries to exercise control over the economic resources of others. For more than 30 years now, from this very rostrum, speakers have demanded a change in the world economic system, since the historical momentum has sought fairness in trade among States and not to perpetuate a system of exploitation that favours only a few at the expense of others.

That is clearly a legitimate demand, which seeks to ensure the rule of law in international relations. The current robust efforts promoting global development should apply that same momentum to the international legal order. Otherwise, we will fall into the vices of anarchy and inequality in treatment in international trade.

In conclusion, Equatorial Guinea welcomes the commitment of African States to engage in the dynamic development of modern democracies, despite the political instability that prevents them from moving forward in accordance with the will of their peoples owing to systems imposed by others that continue to exercise their influence over the internal policies of such countries.

We expect that United Nations resolutions will be implemented in line with the spirit of its Charter and that international provisions governing the sovereign right of States to manage their own political development will be respected. We also expect States to have full enjoyment of their natural resources and leadership of their own political processes without the interference of others in the interests of maintaining international peace and security.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Elbegdorj Tsakhia, President of Mongolia.

President Tsakhia: One of the major goals of Mongolia's transition to democracy has been to establish a society ruled by law. Today, more than 20 years since our democratic revolution, in which not a single window was shattered, I confidently reaffirm our commitment to the rule of law. I commend the Secretary-General's leadership in focusing on the issue, as it is essential both to democratic values and to economic prosperity.

Human rights and the rule of law are interlinked. They belong to the universal and indivisible core values and principles of humankind. If there is no rule of law, it is not possible to ensure human rights and the full enjoyment of freedom. That is at the heart of the social contract between the State and its people. It requires concrete measures to ensure adherence to the principles of the supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law and fairness in applying the law.

The rule of law and corruption cannot coexist. Freedom, human rights and the rule of law are non-negotiable, as is the fight against corruption. The law should apply equally to all. It is a core principle of democracy that no one is above the law — no one. That includes everyone from high Government officials to ordinary citizens.

Historically, Mongolians have governed their State by the rule of law. We have strong penalties for corruption. In developing nations, corruption is the mortal enemy of democracy. It is like an infectious disease. It must be attacked head on and that fight must be a priority. The crime of corruption is committed by public servants, not citizens. The fight against corruption is a test for all leaders and public servants. Since corruption is a serious crime that is linked to power and questionable wealth, some of those who commit corruption try to use the court of public opinion to escape the court of law.

There are strong links between corruption and socio-economic development. Where there are higher levels of corruption, there is less development. The fight for the rule of law is therefore also a fight for more transparent and successful economic development.

Education is crucial in the fight against corruption. Educated populations, where citizens know their rights, do not let their leaders abuse their power. Mongolia is a young democracy. Our success cannot be just political or economic; it must be judicial, as well. We need an independent judiciary, which means that we must focus on creating a judiciary that is immune from political pressure. We have more than 20 new legislative acts aimed at bringing about the structural reform of our legal system.

We see the rule of law as a guarantor of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Governments are created by the people and must serve the people. A Government should honour human rights and never take a human life. I believe that capital punishment is wrong. It degrades human dignity and does not bring peace to society, deter crime or further humankind. Since June 2009, Mongolia has commuted death sentences. As President, I have declared a moratorium. We are working on legislation to abolish the death penalty once and for all.

Last year, Mongolia assumed the presidency of the Community of Democracies. Advancing the rule of law is a top priority for us. We applaud the effort of the international community in that regard. I am grateful that the United Nations, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in particular, has made the rule of law a top priority. It is a passion of mine, and also a goal of Mongolia, because our democratic progress and economic success depend upon it.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic.

President Bongo Ondimba (*spoke in French*): I am honoured to take the floor at this historic meeting on the rule of law at the national and international levels. I would like to congratulate the President on organizing this High-level Meeting, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the work undertaken by the United Nations in promoting the rule of law.

At the outset, I would like to reiterate my country's profound attachment to the rule of law, democracy and human rights and our political will to work towards their consolidation.

The rule of law is today an ideal and a universal aspiration that is largely shared by peoples and Governments. Strengthening the rule of law in a lasting manner cannot take place in any country in the absence of a climate of peace and equitable economic development. The elements of the triad of peace, development and rule of law are interdependent.

Gabon's attachment to the rule of law and democracy has always guided our political life. In 1990, when my country re-established the multi-party system, we established new institutions. Their robustness was put to the test in 2009 when Gabon successfully navigated a delicate political transition that was praised by the international community. Those institutions allow us today to continue to strengthen the rule of law, which is also a pillar of the vision of an emergent Gabon looking towards 2025 that I have proposed for the country.

While democracy and the rule of law must be mutually reinforcing, it is essential for political action in a country to be based on respect for the rules and laws that give them legitimacy. In that regard, I recently reiterated, in a speech before the Gabonese Parliament, that, in a democracy, political dialogue is only possible if there is respect for the nation's institutions and laws and for the persons who embody them. In that connection, I have recently re-launched the National Council for Democracy, a major institutional framework for democratic dialogue in Gabon. Since that body's creation, it has always been chaired by a member of the opposition.

In all countries, consolidating the rule of law relies on independent and impartial justice, which helps to guarantee social peace and security, to protect the rights of the most vulnerable and to prevent extremism and intolerance. That conviction has led me to initiate deep-seated reforms aimed at making the judicial institutions more coherent, effective, transparent, accessible and equitable. In that regard, we have adopted laws aimed at protecting the rights of women and children, in order to combat discrimination embedded in cultural constraints. That can be seen in the new legal system for the protection of minors, which helps to combat child trafficking. Gabon also initiated the adoption of General Assembly resolution 65/189, establishing International Widows' Day. Social stakeholders in Gabon, such as the foundation chaired by the First Lady, are fully involved in these efforts.

Gabon is continuing other major national reforms, including introducing biometric registers to improve vital records and strengthen the transparency of elections; reorganizing the department responsible for housing and land ownership in order to protect the rights of land owners; and combating violations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and other conventions that protect biodiversity and the environment.

Combating the corruption that impedes equitable access for everyone to public services and that undermines development efforts is at the heart of all I do. I recall that Gabon has ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption. My country has a national commission to combat the illegal amassing of wealth and a national financial investigatory agency. The commission has already drawn up a national strategy to combat corruption, with support from the United Nations Development Programme. In addition, to strengthen governance and reinforce the need for accountability, we are participating in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. We have also reviewed the procedures for transactions in public markets, and we have conducted an audit of the civil service and the oil industry. However, combating corruption is a long-term undertaking that requires cooperation based on dialogue with different partners and ownership at the national level.

The challenges facing the international community today call for a strengthened rule of law at the international level. Our work requires an approach that is primarily based on affirming the sovereignty of States and recognizing their rights. We should also say that the rule of law cannot be strengthened without the political will to make global governance and institutions more equitable and democratic.

That is why Gabon believes that Africa must be fairly represented within a reformed Security Council.

Moreover, we believe that improvements in the functioning of the Human Rights Council require more constructive dialogue among States. To that end, Gabon would like to stand for re-election to that important body in January 2013.

In the same spirit, we will continue our cooperation with the agencies responsible for implementing international criminal justice in order to combat impunity and transnational organized crime. Such organized crime is increasingly affecting the environment and biodiversity through poaching and illegal fishing. Gabon intends to strengthen its national justice system to combat that phenomenon, but such efforts will require greater international legal cooperation.

I would like to stress that there is no single model for strengthening the rule of law. Therefore, we need to also promote dialogue and new approaches for cooperation among States. In that respect, countries emerging from crisis and conflict are a priority. That is why I call for further resources to be mobilized for those States. Furthermore, I encourage the strengthening of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, as well as the regular holding of plenary meetings of the General Assembly to consider strengthening the rule of law.

In conclusion, I would like to state that my country endorses the declaration adopted earlier in this meeting.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Bujar Nishani, President of the Republic of Albania.

President Nishani: Let me express at the outset my appreciation for the holding of this High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and the International Levels. In our view, the rule of law is indeed crucial to the well-being and well-functioning of our societies.

The history of humankind is in fact the history of the evolution of the law and of the relation of societies to the law. Every time we have lost the vision to respect the law, at both the national and international levels, we have faced turmoil, wars and suffering. Every time we have committed to respecting the law and to universalizing its core principles, we have found peace, agreement and prosperity.

The truth is, the relationship of humankind to the law is not easy, since our societies, peoples and cultures have different takes on approaching the law. However, we all agree on the fact that, as humans who share the same Earth, we are increasingly required to leave aside our individual interests for the sake of the common good. Albania is glad to have invested wholeheartedly in this role in the United Nations, which has contributed greatly to what we commonly refer to as international law, to which we are all willingly bound to abide by.

Concerning our substantial and sometimes controversial discussions on the rule of law's extent, I would like to emphasize two particular instances of the

universal character of the jurisdiction of international courts and tribunals, as well as of their rulings and options, and to the fact that the full law is not above people. It is there by the will of the people and for the people to serve their existence and well-being.

These principles have proven fundamental to the difficult history that my nation has experienced throughout the centuries. The Albanian people have had a complicated relationship with the rule of law. The manipulated application of the rule of law and the way in which the law was applied to serve the ruling class's concept of justice created in Albania one of the most evil dictatorships in Europe after the Second World War. In fact, the Albanian people's struggle for democracy in the 1990s was closely related to its strong disagreement with the principles of governance of a State not accountable to its promulgated law. Thousands of citizens were subject to summary extra-legal political adjudications and multiple arbitrary judgements by the courts, inconsistent with human rights norms.

It is no surprise, therefore, that for Albania strengthening the rule of law at the national level has become a guiding principle for a new and strengthened democracy and the cornerstone of a harmonious and consolidated society, a solid open-market economy, regional stability and lasting peace and security. It is precisely the principle of the rule of law with which we all align the charters of our national and international laws, our conventions, our regulations and even the very functioning of this body.

Albania is today at the forefront of the support and protection of human rights, and we sympathize with the struggles of all peoples for freedom all over the world, from Syria to Myanmar. Every regime that violates the law of freedom is to be held accountable at the national or international level. The rule of law at the national and the international levels is closely interlinked. The levels reflect one another and, above all, they deserve to enjoy equal and unanimous respect.

We have methodized that in the most concrete way. The Albanian Constitution provides that, in the case of conflict between national and international law, the latter prevails. That is the best guarantee that, while fully respecting State sovereignty, Albania remains a true, committed partner in the promotion of justice and accountability, and firmly against impunity for any crime. In that regard, Albania supports wholeheartedly the principle of universal jurisdiction, as we believe it to be an important mechanism for ending impunity and promoting accountability.

Albania has supported and will always support the mandates of international courts and tribunals, for they play an irreplaceable role in combating impunity and establishing standards of global justice in the interests of peace and security. It is deplorable that the rulings and opinions of international courts and tribunals are sometimes disregarded, even by States that initiate their cases. Such was the case with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the independence of the Republic of Kosovo.

In my region, the Balkans, people of different ethnicities — Albanians, Bosnians and Croats — have experienced some of the worst wars waged in the name of ill-conceived nationalism. Chauvinists sanctioned in law the ideology of their superiority towards other peoples, legitimating their subsequent genocide and massacres. The last two decades have shown that it is not an easy task to turn that page of the Balkan history book.

The perpetrators of tragedies and genocides certainly cannot do it one-sidedly. What is needed is the conscience of all peoples, and first and foremost that of the victims who first demand justice. Disturbingly, in the Balkans, instead of genuine apologies for the massacres and genocide that have been inflicted, we are served with negating statements at the highest levels. It is thus only natural that we uphold respect for the rule of law at both the national and the international levels. Its application is needed and must be directly reflected in our just, peaceful and good relations among us and our neighbours in the region and beyond.

In that regard, Albania has taken crucial steps beyond the national level for the establishment of a constructive dialogue and cooperation with all countries of the region and unconditionally supports all European Union initiatives and the laws of the wider international community in strengthening the rule of law in our region. We praise in particular the exemplary work of the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo as an individual addition to peace and security in the region following the Republic of Kosovo's declaration of independence. We believe that in our region, our objective to establish, respect and abide by the rule of law is an imperative that should be fully embraced by all countries that seriously and sincerely seek full regional cooperation and harmony and the common goal of European integration.

I would like to end my remarks by reiterating Albania's commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, to international law and to international order, based on the rule of law, as vital values for the promotion of our peaceful coexistence as peoples and our harmonious relations and cooperation as States.

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

President Jonathan: Let me join my colleagues in first congratulating the Secretary-General on his initiative to focus attention on a subject matter that is at the heart of the Charter of our Organization, and for providing the platform for Member States to share useful experiences and renew their commitment to the observance of the rule of law.

Nigeria believes that the strengthening of the rule of law at the national and international levels is a shared responsibility of the international community. It is undoubtedly an essential condition for peaceful cooperation and coexistence among States, and critical to addressing global challenges in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Nigeria therefore subscribes to the view that it is only an international system based on the rule of law that can guarantee the protection of the rights of individuals and the interests of the less powerful in the global arena.

We recognize the close nexus between the rule of law and democracy and the primacy of the rule of law as a prerequisite for the promotion and protection of democracy, good governance and sustainable development. Nigeria therefore envisions the promotion of the rule of law at the international level as a vital means of strengthening cooperation and promoting enduring peace and security among States.

Nigeria has also consistently demonstrated strong political will to fulfil its international obligations through the domestication of relevant international instruments and recommended practices, such as the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act 2011 to promote open government, the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 and the Money Laundering (Prohibition) Act 2011 to give impetus to the global fight against terrorism, terrorist financing and economic crimes. The Human Rights Commission (Amendment) Act 2011 was also enacted to broaden its mandate. Similarly, electoral reforms have been undertaken to consolidate the democratic process. Our focus has been on the conduct of credible, free and fair elections in order to avail the citizenry the right to freely choose those who should govern them. The elections conducted so far in Nigeria attest to that.

It is imperative for the rule of law to be strengthened at both the national and international levels to ensure equity and fairness. The rule of law at the international level must be based on a number of the core principles of the United Nations, which were further reaffirmed in the 2005 World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1). This implies that States must, in good faith, honour their international obligations, including the obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force, the obligation to settle disputes through peaceful means, and the obligation to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and abide by international humanitarian law.

The principle of equality of States remains an important element in the promotion of the rule of law at the international level. The international community should therefore discourage any semblance of selective observance and enforcement of international law. I urge Member States to commit to the faithful implementation of the pledges deposited with the United Nations at this event.

Let me assure Member States of my Government's unwavering commitment to upholding the rule of law and to duly implementing the pledges we have made to the international community.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana.

President Mahama: Allow me first to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I also wish to express my profound appreciation to the Secretary-General for organizing this event at this time, when abuse of human rights, arbitrariness, persecution and impunity are on the increase in the world. Let me also single out the special efforts of the co-facilitators, Denmark and Mexico, and commend them for their tireless contribution to the outcome of today's meeting.

Respect for the rule of law at the national and international levels is an integral part of the Charter of the United Nations. Ensuring respect for and the strengthening of the rule of law is fundamental to the

maintenance of peace and international security and the effective promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and is essential to nurturing a vibrant and dynamic democracy.

In Ghana, we believe that respect for the rule of law is essential to building our nation and this has been our thinking since independence. Our national motto, therefore, is "freedom and justice". Ghana has, over the past 20 years following the return to democracy, worked to continuously strengthen our governance institutions. The framework for ensuring respect for the rule of law has been established in our 1992 Constitution, and continues to be further elaborated and extended. That includes the passage of legislation to ensure accountable and good governance, transparency in public procurement, the transparent management of oil revenues, press freedom, human rights, and transparent and credible elections, to name just a few.

Ghana is reaping the dividends of democracy and rule of law. The stable atmosphere created as a result of constitutional governance since 1992 has seen a remarkable increase in economic growth. Last year, Ghana's economy grew by some 14 per cent, one of the highest rates in the world. Per capita income for Ghanaians has grown from $400 in 1992 to $1,300 today, pushing Ghana into lower-middle-income status.

During visits to Ghana in 2009, President Barack Obama said that what Africa needs is not strong leaders, but strong institutions. The Government of Ghana is therefore in the process of undertaking the following interventions, by developing appropriate legislation, policy and administrative reforms in the following areas: building the capacities of governance institutions responsible for ensuring compliance with existing laws; strengthening the judicial service and other agencies responsible for the administration of justice to build confidence in the judicial system, both for our citizens and for our guests who may have social or business interests in Ghana; reviewing the laws on investment promotion and protection; strengthening the institutions that investigate and prosecute cases relating to corruption; strengthening the framework governing the banking and financial service sector; the integration of information and revenue management systems; organization to promote greater efficiency in revenue collection; and ensuring transparent management and utilization of Ghana's oil revenues.

Ghana is a State party to many international conventions, treaties and protocols, and recently we became a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its related Protocols, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

We have also incorporated many international conventions, protocols and systems into our municipal laws. We are committed to ensuring that we respect and give effect to all international conventions, treaties and protocols to which we are a State party.

We believe that it is also important to give attention to regional and subregional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States and to help strengthen the institutions that we have established through those regional groupings in order to promote the rule of law both regionally and on the continent.

The Government of Ghana recognizes that our systems for ensuring respect for the rule of law can be considered effective only if they successfully uphold and protect the legal rights of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. Our goal, therefore, is to live up to our national motto of being a land that ensures freedom and justice for all our citizens and those who reside and work in our country.

In short, we believe that respect for the rule of law is essential to the creation of a fairer and more just world and to the promotion of peace, prosperity and cooperation.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya.

President Kibaki: I congratulate the President on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session. I am confident that his vast diplomatic experience will be instrumental in steering our deliberations.

Kenya supports an international order that is grounded in the rule of law, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. We are convinced that the rule of law is the foundation stone of democratic governance, that it is vital in confronting the global challenges of our time, and that it is necessary for promoting sustainable development.

Since independence, Kenya has progressively promoted the rule of law and respect for democratic constitutionality. Our democratic enterprise over the past 49 years has been to strengthen the rule of law, promote human rights and advance our economic and social development.

Promoting the rule of law remains as important today as it was at our independence. We are proud to say that over time, however, the rule of law has not only further secured our democracy, but it has also allowed my country to promote entrepreneurship, free trade and the fight against poverty.

In the past two years, my Government has worked strenuously to implement our new Constitution, which Kenya adopted in 2010. We have implemented far-reaching legal, institutional and administrative reforms which have further strengthened the rule of law in Kenya. Furthermore, those reforms have spurred increased activity across all sectors of the economy. That has increased investment and encouraged greater involvement of the Kenyan people in the development and governance of our country.

Kenya's national commitment to the promotion of the rule of law and democratic governance transcends our national boundaries. We are committed, as a member of the international community, to playing our part in promoting the rule of law throughout the world, and especially in our region.

In that regard, it is my sincere hope that the international community will work with us, especially in countries that have suffered a breakdown of law and order.

In conclusion, I believe that effective international relations must be based on the equal and just application of the rule of law among nations, both large and small.

It is also important that the rule of law be pursued towards the attainment of greater prosperity, the promotion of equality and greater justice for all.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by Her Excellency Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia.

President Johnson-Sirleaf (Liberia): The decision to convene this debate on the rule of law is timely and opportune because transformative changes are occurring in the international arena, and they dictate that we affirm our shared values. We believe fundamentally that national and international peace and security must rest upon our acceptance of the supremacy of law in the conduct of affairs, and indeed that law must be founded on the principles of fairness and justice.

The Government and people of Liberia, working closely with the United Nations and the international community, have made significant progress in re-establishing the rule of law after 14 years of a ravaging conflict that crippled the entire rule of law system. In the consolidation of peace, we have focused particular attention on the re-establishment of the rule of law. It was an important pillar of our poverty reduction strategy, and today it is an integral part of our agenda for transformation. It occupies a central place in our engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission and is a strong link binding the countries of the Group of Seven Plus.

We are proud of the progress we have made in rebuilding the justice and security institutions in terms of structure and capacity, especially the Liberian National Police and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the foremost institutions charged with ensuring internal security. We have, among other things, set up a number of institutions. We have established a sexual and gender-based violence crimes unit and a specialized court that is investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual and gender-based violence. We have enacted a freedom of information act, signed the Table Mountain Declaration, and instituted a law reform commission, which is modernizing our national laws, bringing them into conformity with international standards. We have established an independent commission of human rights, which has been challenged to promote a human rights culture and help foster reconciliation among our people. We have created a land commission, which is reforming the land tenure system so as to minimize conflict around land ownership in the country. We have set up a judicial institute that is engaged in ongoing training of judges and other justice actors to enhance the capacity of the judiciary, and a new commercial court, which is enabling the Government to speedily resolve matters relating to commercial transactions, thus improving the investment climate.

Efforts are under way to improve other components of the criminal justice system. They include the construction and rehabilitation of corrections facilities across the country. We have also introduced a probation service, a magistrate's sitting programme and a pre-detention task force. We have passed a new jury

law, which will not only improve the qualifications of jurors but also expand the jurisdiction of the magisterial courts so that minor cases will be disposed of more expeditiously.

Last week, with resolution 2066 (2012), the Security Council formally endorsed a phased reconfiguration of the United Nations Mission in Liberia over a three-year period. As we move forward towards implementing that transition, we are even more challenged to maintain the momentum for change and reform. An important objective is to decentralize the operations of justice and security institutions. The establishment of five regional justice and security hubs in strategic locations across the country will enhance the decentralization process and make justice more accessible to remote parts of the country. The first such hub is more than 50 per cent operational.

We also face challenges that are daunting but not insurmountable. They include mobilizing resources to construct the four remaining hubs, implementing constitutional reform and the repeal of obsolete laws, accelerating the development of our human resource capacity, extending sexual and gender-based violence services in all 15 of our counties, expanding community corrections and rehabilitation programmes for criminal offenders, and harmonizing the formal and informal justice systems so as to provide greater access to justice.

We are not deterred by those challenges. Rather, we are encouraged by the positive outcomes that we have witnessed in our reform efforts. In that spirit, we make the following voluntary pledges. First, we will develop and publicize an integrated national strategy for the justice and security sector by the end of the year 2013. Secondly, we will develop a multi-year strategy and to establish a sexual and gender-based violence unit in all of our 15 counties by 2015. Thirdly, we will establish a civilian oversight board for the Liberian National Police by the year 2013, to accept complaints from the public on acts of police misconduct. Fourthly, we will ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Finally, we will introduce new legislation and training programmes to tackle transnational crimes by mid-2013.

In making these pledges, we reaffirm that the rule of law is a fundamental tenet of good governance in all of its dimensions. We undertake to continue to put in place those institutions that will consolidate peace and reconciliation through greater access to justice. In that effort, we will work in concert with our partners, whose support is invaluable and highly appreciated.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia.

President Pohamba: It is my distinct honour and pleasure to address this High-level Meeting on the important subject of the rule of law at the national and international levels. The Republic of Namibia is founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all. Our Constitution contains a bill of rights that provides for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. All State organs are enjoined to uphold, respect, protect and guarantee those rights and freedoms.

In keeping with its commitment to the rule of law and to multilateralism, our country has acceded to the relevant international treaties and conventions that promote the rule of law. We have also joined subregional, regional and international organizations such as the Southern African Development Community, the African Union and the United Nations, in order to help foster a system of international governance based on respect for the sovereign equality of States, territorial integrity and other principles related to peaceful coexistence among States, based on the purposes and ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

This High-level Meeting is convened to reaffirm, among other things, our commitment to and respect for the principle of the rule of law. While the United Nations Charter assigns to the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it has become clear with the passage of time that the current composition and structure of the Council are unrepresentative and undemocratic. It is for that reason that we reiterate our call for comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make it more democratic and transparent and to better represent and serve the whole of humankind. Furthermore, we encourage the Council to coordinate constantly with regional organizations in fulfilling its mandates, including in the areas of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and sustainable peacebuilding.

We welcome the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Delivering justice: programme of action to strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels" (A/66/749), take note of the proposal that the

General Assembly adopt a programme of action for the rule of law, and look forward to discussing mechanisms that will enhance dialogue on the rule of law.

The United Nations came into being in order to protect humankind from the scourge of war. The only way that noble goal can be achieved is if all its Member States refrain from the threat or use of force in any manner that is inconsistent with the purposes and principles of justice and international law, the right to self-determination, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, respect for human rights and, indeed, for the equal rights of all without distinction as to race, language, religion or cultural and social character. These are our common obligations under the Charter of the Organization.

It is also our duty to ensure that we avoid the perception that certain international institutions are used to advance the interests of certain Member States, to the disadvantage of others. In that regard, the operations of institutions such as the International Criminal Court should be guided at all times by fairness and objective assessment in order to ensure justice. We should avoid the temptation of subjecting this institution to self-serving political considerations and influences.

Let me once again reiterate that we believe strongly that the application and practice of the rule of law, especially at the international level, will always have true meaning within the spirit of the United Nations Charter if it is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all States, big or small.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda.

President Kagame: It is important that we are discussing how to make the rule of law more effective domestically and internationally, and I am pleased to participate. In that endeavour, let me propose that we consider three points relating directly to the subject of the rule of law, with the aim of addressing present-day realities.

We can begin with the important principle of universal justice, an ideal that I believe we would all like to see realized. The rule of law internationally is premised on the principle that equality before the law is universal. This, however, is not always the case. In actual fact, what many countries can attest to is that in its application justice is often not pursued fairly or without favour. What may be overlooked in one situation can meet with aggressive sanctions in another. Some national jurisdictions have assumed priority over others without any legal or other justification, resulting in the law being applied selectively. What is more useful is for people to work together towards a form of universal justice that is meaningful to all concerned. In that way, the rule of law will uphold equality among nations, guarantee fairness and recognize and respect sovereignty without discrimination.

Secondly, as a global community we should be alert to the dangers of politicizing justice at both the national and the international levels, since, ultimately, this undermines the rule of law. We see principles such as universal jurisdiction often being used selectively and in one direction as a political tool in the arena of international affairs for the purpose of control and domination. Rwanda has first-hand experience of the importance of the rule of law and, more specifically, of the implications of its absence, disregard or unequal application. That absence destroyed our country in the decades after independence, leading up to the genocide of 1994 and followed by unjust treatment in the name of universal jurisdiction, where it has been very clear that motives veer closer to the political than the legal.

To turn to my third point, these two issues of justice and politics are complex and closely intertwined, requiring a contextual and balanced approach. A purely punitive course of action is not always the best, even when grievances are legitimate and obvious. In fact, the single pursuit of either justice or political imperatives may aggravate the situation.

Rwanda's experience following the genocide is a stark example. From a purely legal perspective, there were hundreds of thousands of perpetrators and a strong case for a punitive approach. However, to best serve our priorities of both justice and social harmony, we sought to balance the strict application of the punitive provisions of the law with restorative alternatives. That home-grown solution through the gacaca courts process served us better than any other system could have.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The principle of balancing punitive and restorative forms of justice is applicable to the international arena. The current international justice climate reveals that, too often, the motives for pursuing justice are punitive, political and aimed at serving at certain interests,

especially those of one party over others. The situation needs to change to ensure that there is parity between nations, double standards are eliminated and fairness and respect for the rule of law are established at the international level.

To achieve that, it is crucial to adhere to certain minimum standards of the rule of law. Those include the right to a fair hearing, respect for basic human rights, and the existence of review mechanisms to check excesses in the process, which must take into account the context of the situation in each country, because ultimately justice must be served and must be anchored in society.

We have been able to strengthen the rule of law in our country, particularly through universal access to quality justice, so that citizens are not hindered by financial constraints or by their distance from judicial centres. Those and other efforts have been supported by our partners. We acknowledge that cooperation, which has complemented our own initiatives. We look forward to continuing and expanding it to address the broader issues we are discussing today.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jacob Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa.

President Zuma: I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion.

South Africa's foreign policy is geared towards the vision of creating a better South Africa and contributing to a better Africa and a better world. It is our assertion that all this can be fully realized only where there is a global commitment to the promotion of the rule of law and the realization of human rights worldwide. We feel at home in this discussion because South Africa is a sovereign democratic State founded on specific values, which include the supremacy of the Constitution, the rule of law, human dignity, equality and freedom. The rule of law requires adherence to a number of principles, including the supremacy of the law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law and the separation of powers. It also entails participation in decision-making, legal certainty, and the avoidance of arbitrariness, as well as procedural and legal transparency.

The rule of law is an integral concept in the work of the Security Council. Since 2003, the Council has held regular thematic debates on the rule of law in the context of international peace and security. Several presidential statements have recognized the crucial relevance of the rule of law across the full spectrum of the Council's agenda. Thematic and country-specific resolutions adopted by the Council since 2003 have also regularly addressed issues related to the rule of law, in both its international and national dimensions.

The rule of law is inextricably linked to human development. In that regard, in our efforts to promote the rule of law, we continuously strive to raise the standards of living of the disadvantaged in society through the provision of essential services and the fulfillment of their socio-economic rights.

South Africa continues to play an active role in the kind of peace and harmony that are dependent on the rule of law. We do this in a number of ways, including through bilateral and trilateral agreements, as well as through mediation efforts in various parts of the world. We are also of the view that efforts to promote the rule of law at the national level, including the promotion of accountability mechanisms, must be accompanied by equal attention to the rule of law at the international level. Otherwise, the United Nations runs the risk of being accused of double standards and hypocrisy.

In that regard, we need to consider the fairness of the rules of international law. We need to ask whether the international community can be said to be governed by a system in which all key players are accountable under laws that are equally enforced and independently adjudicated. We also need to look at the composition of the Security Council and how it may impact the promotion of international law, and the rule of law in particular. Given the undemocratic and unrepresentative nature of the Security Council, we are concerned that its decisions will be constantly attacked for lack of legitimacy, regardless of the content of a given decision.

It is common knowledge that the current configuration of the Council is unfair. It does not reflect contemporary geopolitical realities, especially with respect to Africa. The African continent is both generally underrepresented and specifically unrepresented in the permanent category.

Adherence to the international rule of law will continue to elude us as long as the organ with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security is unrepresentative and undemocratic.

But we also have to ask whether the content of the decisions themselves is fair. Over the past year, we have seen both inspiring improvements and spectacular disappointments in the promotion of the rule of law through the Council's work.

The adoption of resolution 1989 (2011), bringing the Al-Qaida sanctions regime closer to human rights and due-process standards, is a noteworthy illustration of the Council's willingness to adhere to the rule of law. The regime had been severely criticized for lack of due process in the listing and delisting of individuals. The resolution was an improvement in that it provided individuals with recourse to challenge unfounded listings. However, as we noted during the Security Council's debate on the rule of law in January 2012 (see S/PV.6705), there is a need to ensure greater accountability for action taken in the name of the Security Council.

Perhaps nothing reflects adherence to the rule of law so much as the judicial settlement of disputes. We continue, in that regard, to encourage the organs of the United Nations, including the Council, to make greater use of the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, by making requests for advisory opinions when confronted with complex legal questions.

We welcome this important decision, as we need to reflect on all these critical points from time to time, in order to further strengthen multilateralism. Let me emphasize that South Africa remains committed to the global promotion of the rule of law and will continue to cooperate with the United Nations system to ensure the success of the international human rights architecture.

We wish to thank President Jeremić for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Michael Chilufya Sata, President of the Republic of Zambia.

President Sata: We from Zambia are pleased to be guests in this historic and welcoming city, in particular on this auspicious occasion, which reflects the importance and timeliness of the issue of the rule of law.

Since its inception in 1945, the United Nations has been influential in supporting the rule of law across the world. It has helped in the creation of a forum where the universal standards for a basic functioning legal system have been successfully articulated.

While some of the developing countries have adopted laws emanating from the colonial period, it is true that most of the resultant justice systems are in harmony with the general tenets of the rule of law. Among them is the non-discriminatory character of law, or the right to a fair hearing. Today, the concept has evolved further to require that in the application of penal rules to offenders, there must not be any derogation of their basic human dignity. In that regard, the prohibition of the use of torture as a means of extracting a confession is a principle that enjoys universal acceptance.

The adage that it is more difficult to build than to destroy is particularly true for the rule of law. That means that there is a need for a solid foundation upon which national legal systems should rest. Public confidence in a legal system is paramount, and the population needs to feel that the law is working for the common good.

Before reiterating the importance of rule of law in the international context, allow me to highlight some of the practical impediments to enhancing this principle in developing countries such as Zambia. One major challenge is that of accessing justice amid the poverty that afflicts many of our people. In that context, it seldom happens that justice comes with an affordable price tag.

Against that background, many therefore opt for alternative and often extrajudicial means of seeking remedy or protection. Closely related to this is the mischief done by those with money and power when they abuse it by offering corrupt inducements in order to pervert the course of justice.

I am therefore pleased to state that since my Government assumed power a year ago, Zambians have embraced a reinvigorated programme to promote respect for the rule of law by fighting vices such as corruption. The Government, for its part, is implementing a robust anti-corruption crusade, which has significantly helped in restoring confidence in the governance system. The Government has further undertaken educational programmes aimed at sensitizing the public to the importance of reporting corruption and related vices.

The Zambian Parliament has also been active in pushing legislative measures such as the reintroduction of the offence of abuse of office under the Anti-Corruption Act of 2012. Another example is

the enactment of laws against gender-based violence to protect our women, so that they can effectively contribute to development without fear of victimization.

From the judicial perspective, measures such as the creation of small claims courts are proving to be essential in fostering the rule of law by offering a quicker and more affordable avenue for the dispensation of justice, as claimants need not hire legal representation, but can instead pursue their claims in person.

Furthermore, our Government has continued to support the Human Rights Commission of Zambia in the Commission's role of providing oversight over Government and other parties in the realm of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals.

Let me also mention that Zambia is presently undertaking a constitutional review process under the guidance of a technical review committee, which aims to once again restore dignity to individuals by granting liberty. This process also aims to ensure a democratic governance system with efficient, strong and independent structures endowed with oversight functions. This is the legacy we hope to create and pass on.

I am by no means implying that those values were previously unknown to our people. Indeed, were it not for the Zambian people's vigilance and civil awareness, my election through the ballot box might not have been guaranteed. As a matter of emphasis, our Government has brought renewed energy to consolidating the rule of law.

Returning to the international realm, I want to acknowledge that treaties are an important part of how States maintain relations among themselves. Zambia greatly values the role that the United Nations plays in supporting the integrity of the international rules. Major progress has indeed been recorded in bringing the world under a common understanding of State organization and duties. For that, we of the United Nations must congratulate ourselves.

However, it remains a concern that the process of reaching international agreement has taken on a new dynamic that in most cases has delayed the finalization of treaties. I wonder why that should be, when we are in an era where our physical separation is diminishing in importance and our commonality is ever increasing.

For its part, Zambia is party to many international treaties that support the rule of law, among them the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and many more. We intend to improve our record. We therefore wish to utilize this platform to pledge our continued quest to improve our country's adherence to important treaties, our current focus being on those that seek to counter nuclear terrorism.

I would like to endorse what South Africa said. From the founding of the League of Nations to today, Africa has been more a spectator than a participant. We are not permanent members of the Security Council, yet we represent 54 Members in this House. We cannot speak of the rule of law when we do not respect each other. Therefore, all Africans must stand up and be counted. We must be on the Council as permanent members.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission.

Mr. Barroso (European Commission): It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today in this first-ever High-level Meeting on the rule of law.

This is a topic that means a lot to me and to the European Union, which I am proud to represent here today. The European Union is a union of values and a community of law. Primary among those values are the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These are the pillars on which our European Union is built. These are the values that have spurred the European Union forward in good times and held us together in more difficult ones, the values that we need to nurture and strengthen every day. These are the values that contain the transformative power that has taken our new member States from totalitarianism to thriving democracies in a quarter of a century — a transformative power that is taking hold in our neighbourhood and that we will support not just to our south and east, but wherever there are calls for it.

The rule of law is a core principle of the international system of which this great institution — the United Nations — is the heart. That is why we wholeheartedly support the work of this High-level Meeting and the Declaration just adopted (resolution 67/1). We recognize and welcome in particular the importance of linking the rule of law agenda to the work of the

United Nations on peace and security, human rights and development, which are simultaneously preconditions for and enablers of democracy and the rule of law.

This support is not simply declaratory. In each of the areas covered by the Declaration, the European Union will make substantive pledges, backed up by concrete measures. The European Union member States have presented a list gathering all their pledges. Allow me just to highlight some of our priorities.

First is strengthening the rule of law at the international level. Respect for international law is the best alternative to the use of force, but when the use of force is inevitable, it should be legitimized by the international law emanating from this Organization. Respect for international law is also the best way to guarantee the peaceful settlement of disputes among nations. At a moment when tensions are rising in some regions of the world, international law offers the possibility of cooperative and negotiated solutions. In that context, the role of the International Court of Justice should be recognized.

Secondly, we need to do more to uphold international law in our national systems. The European Union member States have some of the best records in terms of ratifying international conventions. But we can and will do more, not only to ratify but to ensure effective implementation.

We will work both inside the European Union and with our partners to improve the delivery of justice, including through supporting a worldwide campaign on the right to a fair trial. We can and will do more to promote transitional justice by working with the United Nations in conflict and post-conflict situations. The role of the International Criminal Court is essential in that regard. We pledge to further support its work politically and through targeted assistance to acceding states.

Justice is indeed an essential element in fostering human development. To help create an enabling environment for its development, we will further strengthen the fight against corruption.

Globalization is not just about positive economic links. In fact, transnational threats are also developing very quickly. From terrorism and organized crime to maritime piracy and human trafficking, these are problems that put our democracies and the security of our citizens at risk. The European Union pledges to strengthen its own capacities to face these dangers and, more importantly, to help our partners and the United Nations as a whole to strengthen theirs.

But it is not just security threats that may harm the democratic fabric of societies. The populist and extreme nationalist tendencies that germinate in times of economic and social turmoil also represent a considerable peril to the rule of law, open societies and democratic systems.

That is why we also need responsible political leadership that puts the rule of law and the interests of citizens above its own. There is no true democracy without the rule of law, and without democracy the rule of law is just an instrument in the hands of rulers.

In that context, allow me to say a word on the appalling situation in Syria. Syria is currently the most dramatic example of how non-respect for the rule of law, human rights and democracy can lead to violence and human suffering.

To conclude, I would like to say that the rule of law is at the heart of the European Union. It is at the heart of the United Nations, and it should assist and protect every person on the planet. That is why our final pledge is to seek to empower those most vulnerable in society, especially women and children, because ultimately the rule of law is not meant to protect rulers but, rather, to serve us all equally, from the mightiest to the most marginalized.

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now hear an address by Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina: I congratulate the President and the organizers of today's first-ever High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels held at the United Nations. I also congratulate the Secretary-General for his excellent report on the rule of law (A/66/749).

Peace in our world today is threatened by, among other things, civil wars, peoples' uprisings, religious intolerance, transnational crimes, terrorism, piracy, the impacts of climate change, and the financial and energy crises. Hence has grown the need to reaffirm humankind's faith in the just, equitable and fair application of the rule of law, the Charter of the United Nations and its principles of justice and international law, and the Statute of the International Court of Justice for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Bangladesh believes in peace and justice within the State and in State-to-State relations. Bangladesh also believes in sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Those principles emanate from the philosophy of "friendship towards all, malice towards none" of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation who, 38 years ago, at the General Assembly, declared that philosophy, together with the importance and the necessity of the rule of law and justice for all nations, as the foundation of our foreign policy.

However, nations have diverse legal systems. Therefore, the Statute of the International Court of Justice emphasizes the representation of major civilizations and principal legal systems of the world in the composition of the Court. Unfortunately, given the current power structure and architecture of global institutions, equitable application of international law in accordance with International Court of Justice principles and the realization of a just global order based on the rule of law for all remain an illusion. To have a just world order based on the rule of law, powerful nations must respect international legal systems and multilateral treaties and support the fair and just application of customary international law in the multilateral decision-making process. Greater voice and representation for developing countries in such major global institutions as the Security Council, the International Court of Justice and Bretton Woods institutions is vital to ensuring the principle of equity. Multilateral institutions also must assist developing countries in their capacity-building efforts for the efficient implementation of the rule of law.

Our Constitution is the supreme law of the land. The Constitution pledges that

> "it shall be a fundamental aim of the State to realise through the democratic process a socialist society free from exploitation, a society in which the rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedoms, equality and justice, political, economic and social, will be secured for all citizens".

It guarantees thereby 18 fundamental rights and prohibits the legislature from passing any law inconsistent with those provisions.

It has also been the pledge of the Father of the Nation — and my own — to uphold the rule of law without any discrimination in our national and foreign policy actions.

In our region, with our neighbour India, in 1996 we signed the 30-year Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, and in 2011 the protocol to the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement that resolved a 64-year-old dispute. With our other neighbour, Myanmar, this year we settled the 41-year-old maritime boundary dispute under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. At home, we settled a 20-year-old conflict with the hill ethnic communities by concluding the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord. Our respect for international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the pacific settlement of disputes is reflected in our role as one of the top troop-contributing countries in United Nations peacekeeping operations. It is also reflected in our being party to almost all international conventions on disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, human rights, humanitarian law, counter-terrorism, transnational crimes, and so on.

Bangladesh is the world's eighth largest democracy. We promote our secular and progressive aspirations based on the rule of law and justice. We believe that that is a precondition for sustainable peace, development and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development goals.

During its tenure, our Government has, through amendments, restored secularism to our Constitution and strengthened barriers to usurpation of State power by undemocratic forces. On the basis of the rule of law and justice, we have concluded trials of religious extremists and terrorists, held trials of the killers of the Father of the Nation after permitting them to exercise all their rights as defendants, held the trial of war criminals from our war of liberation in 1971, and separated the judiciary from the executive to make it fully independent in delivering fair and equitable justice to all.

To ensure the rule of law, in our last term, we made legal services affordable to such vulnerable and marginalized groups as women and minorities by enacting the 2001 Legal Aid Services Regulation Act. That led to the creation of a successful nationwide legal aid services organization, with units on the national, district, *upazila* and even union levels providing free legal aid and access to justice through hotline services.

Closely linked are the traditional, informal village courts, or shalish, and family courts that complement the State-led rural justice system. Those courts, formalized by the Village Court Act of 2006 and

the non-governmental organizations that organized alternate dispute resolution systems, allow free-of-cost access to an informal justice system at the grass roots, following local customs and traditions. They are active in all 4,576 unions and are relieving the burden of pending cases from the formal justice system. In the past two years, 15,000 of 20,000 cases were solved in six months, with $380 million given as compensation to victims. It is an outstanding alternative dispute resolution and rule of law achievement. An international arbitration centre was also established to deliver informal dispute resolution for businesses from all over the world.

To strengthen democracy and the rule of law, our Government has also strengthened its commissions on information, anti-corruption, national human rights, law, energy regulations and elections. A citizen's charter of rights has been instituted in all public institutions to ensure that the Government delivers the rule of law and public services to every citizen. I am particularly happy that we could deliver justice and rights to our women. Our being signatories to 14 international anti-terrorism treaties; our amending of existing national laws on counter-terrorism and anti-money-laundering between 2009 to 2012 to make them at par with international treaties; our adherence to the Palermo Convention of 2011; our adoption of a human trafficking act, the Mutual Legal Assistance in Crimes Act of 2012, the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Anti-Money Laundering Act of 2012 — all of this reflects our commitment to the rule of law and to countering terrorism.

Bangladesh is a responsible, peace-loving nation and my Government is a strong proponent of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and secularism. I am personally committed to peace, justice, development, women's empowerment, and I am concentrating all efforts towards entrenching the rule of law at home and elsewhere. I shall continue doing the same with the active moral, ethical and technical capacity-building support of all stakeholders in the area of the rule of law, our people, judiciary, law enforcement forces, civil society, non-governmental organizations, social and community groups and organizations, our international development partners and all international institutions, particularly the United Nations, which I believe will lead to the creation of a better universe for our future generations.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Milanović (Croatia): The rule of law constitutes the very essence of a social contract between individuals and their Government. Citizens have the right to transparency, non-discrimination, fairness and equality in their standing before the law and in their social interactions. It is, in a way, a right to the legitimate expectation of a citizen against the discriminatory treatment of the Government. If we define democracy as a vehicle, a journey, then liberty is the goal and the end in itself. It is all about liberty. At the same time, we are encountering the same principles being applied at the international level, thereby contributing to reinforcing the sovereign equality of nations, their political independence and territorial integrity, as well as the maintenance of collective peace and security as envisioned in the Charter of the United Nations.

The rule of law should cover every aspect of the daily political and social life of all citizens around the world. My Government is firmly committed to the effective and equitable delivery of public services, to their transparency and accountability and to the opportunity to scrutinize and review such services, including by vulnerable or marginalized groups or individuals.

On the part of citizens, those obligations correspond to the principles of civic responsibility, social solidarity and zero tolerance for corruption, abuse or mismanagement. At the same time, in exercising the principles of legal security, every Government should constantly adhere to established international legal norms and mechanisms against corruption, international organized crime, terrorism and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

Croatia is a State party to all relevant international instruments aimed at the suppression of those crimes, and it is committed to their decisive implementation. To strengthen the rule of law agenda, we need successful cooperation among States, in particular within the United Nations framework, and positive contributions from major United Nations bodies, notably from the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Croatia remains fully devoted to the principles of international justice and the resolution of disputes by peaceful means and in conformity with international

law. We highly value the contribution of international courts and tribunals in advancing the rule of law at the international and national levels, in particular the important role of the International Court of Justice. Strongly supporting significant efforts aimed at ending once and for all the "culture of impunity", Croatia made the Rome Statute an integral part of its national legislation, including penalizing, in its new criminal code, the recently defined crime of aggression.

Croatia continues to fully cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and closely follows its decisions, including their future doctrinal and practical consequences.

Negligence for and rejection of the rule of law often lie at the root of conflict. Weakened State institutions can undermine their independence, impartiality and effectiveness. Croatia recognizes the critical importance of the rule of law in post-conflict peacebuilding, peacekeeping and conflict-prevention activities and fully supports greater coherence and mobilization of the United Nations system-wide expertise on the issue.

My country pays particular attention to the rebuilding of national civilian capacities and to institutions' implementation of national peacebuilding strategies. We have already contributed to CapMatch, an online platform established to better match the demand and supply of specialized civilian capacities, and we are ready to deploy our relevant expertise.

As the current Vice-Chair of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, we continue to promote the centrality of the rule of law in the daily struggles of conflict-affected countries towards sustainable peace and development. Without peace and the rule of law there can be no development; without development there can be no durable peace and prosperity. Croatia supports including linkages between security, justice and development issues in the forthcoming consideration of the United Nations development agenda.

Finally, allow me to reiterate the commitment of my Government and my country with regard to the application and full implementation of the rule of law.

In the past 20 years, Croatia has made a long and demanding journey: from war-torn nation hosting United Nations peacekeeping missions and recipient of international humanitarian aid and development assistance, through post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and development, to a country at the doorstep of European Union membership, provider of development assistance and participant in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding efforts throughout the world.

In the course of that journey, Croatia has made committed efforts to respect the principle of the rule of law, recognizing it as the very essence of any democratic society. That principle remains the cornerstone of our national and international policy, and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners on enhancing, promoting and strengthening our joint agenda on this demanding issue.

Let me conclude by expressing our full support for the final Declaration (resolution 67/1) resulting from this meeting. Keeping in mind the cross-cutting nature of the rule-of-law agenda, we particularly support the General Assembly's decision to continue to develop further linkages between the rule of law and the three main pillars of the work of the United Nations: peace and security, human rights and development, thus contributing to a more prosperous, peaceful and just world.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Laurent Salvador Lamothe, Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooperation of the Republic of Haiti.

Mr. Lamothe (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): It is a great pleasure for me to speak at this High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels. I am particularly pleased to thank the Secretary-General for having chosen as the topic of debate for this special Meeting a concept that is one of the priority themes for the Government of Haiti.

At the outset, I should like to inform the Assembly that in the area of the rule of law, tremendous progress has been made in Haiti over the past 14 months.

The Government of Haiti has devoted itself to the irreversible establishment of the rule of law in Haiti. We have thus undertaken aggressively to combat corruption and smuggling. Today all Ministers in my Government have declared their assets, and the effects of this are already being felt.

One of the major problems facing the judicial system in Haiti is lack of independence and autonomy. It is floundering and chronically dysfunctional and thus unable to meet the expectations of the people of Haiti. The rule of law cannot prevail in our country if judicial security is not guaranteed.

It was not until President Michel Martelly took the helm as the head of State that laws were implemented to bring about, and even ensure, the independence of the judiciary. The Supreme Court, which had been bereft of a president and of several judges for more than five years, is today operational. That represents a concrete step towards the establishment of the rule of law in Haiti.

The Superior Council of the Judiciary, the supervisory and administrative body of the justice system, has been established. Pursuant to the 2007 law, the Superior Council, as the relevant administrative body, together with the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, will be playing a key role in judicial reform and in the functioning of the justice system in Haiti.

The Government has chosen rigorously to refrain from interfering in the judicial system. However, it is making every effort to provide it with the required framework and financial resources. The new authorities of Haiti believe that judges are the cornerstone of the rule of law. It is they who must ensure respect for the law both by citizens and by State bodies. Hence a judge must embody the intrinsic qualities of impartiality, honesty and objectivity. We are working tirelessly to shelter judges from all economic or political pressure.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Security is in the process of strengthening the process of judicial inspections. The tools necessary better to monitor the administration and exercise of justice have been established and their use promoted, with a view to speeding up the processing of cases within the judicial system.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Security will be focusing in particular on the combat against preventive detention and ensuring the respect of human rights by judicial and police institutions.

As the Assembly is aware, the establishment of the rule of law also involves the keeping of public records, which is a vital part of any organized society. The Government of Haiti will be giving careful consideration to the consolidation, modernization and institutionalization of its capacity to establish a national identification and registration system.

In the area of the strengthening of infrastructure, several projects are already under way, including the construction of the headquarters of the Haitian National Police, the office of its Inspector-General and the maritime base at Les Cayes, as well as repairs to several police stations that were heavily impacted by the earthquake of 12 January 2010.

The rule of law cannot prevail in the absence of the promotion and respect of human rights. A policy aimed at combating social exclusion and extreme poverty has been established, and the issue of human rights remains a core concern of my Administration. The Martelly-Lamothe Government, which it is my honour to lead, is determined to overcome the remaining obstacles in that area.

Given the situation, the President of the Republic of Haiti and I deemed it necessary to establish, for the first time in the history of our country, a ministry with responsibility for promoting human rights and combating extreme poverty, in order to encompass all dimensions of human rights, that is to say, civil and political rights as well as economic and social ones.

Articles 19 and 20 of the Haitian Constitution enshrine the right to life and abolish capital punishment entirely. In order to ensure that members of the police force respect the right to life, the Government has undertaken to build the capacities of the general inspectorate of the police and to raise awareness among its officers by requiring them to take mandatory human rights courses in police academy training programmes. The freedom of expression has been guaranteed in Haiti since the adoption of the 1987 Constitution. The press in Haiti today enjoys complete freedom. The Constitution also guarantees freedom of worship and of association. Voodoo is practised with no discrimination against its followers, with a decree of 4 April 2003 defining it as a religion like any other. All citizens are free to form associations, observing the legal provisions in force. By way of example, there are more than 50 political parties in Haiti.

Despite all that progress, there is a long road ahead in Haiti in the area of human rights. The matter of prisons and lengthy preventive detention are also areas requiring urgent Government action. We have established a prison management database, which will be enhanced. All those efforts require international cooperation and support by the friends of Haiti.

In conclusion, I would highlight the role that citizens are called upon to play in the rule of law. Education for all and the rule of law are inseparable. That is the reason that those two concepts are the two pillars of my team's programme.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Thomas Motsoahae Thabane, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Mr. Thabane (Lesotho): Allow me to congratulate the President on convening this very important High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels.

The world that we are living in has always been characterized by wars, injustice and inequality since the dawn of time. The establishment of the United Nations, in 1945, ushered in hope for humankind that the rule of law in international relations would reign and breed freedom, justice and prosperity. Indeed, respect for the rule of law is at the very heart of the United Nations. However, challenges to the rule of law abound, both at the national and international levels. The lack of respect for the rule of law has led to brutal conflicts, oppressive rule and violations of human rights in some parts of the world. This High-level Meeting therefore presents a golden opportunity for us to reaffirm our commitment to enhancing respect for the rule of law and to agree on concrete steps on how to consolidate it at both the national and international levels.

In the recent past, the concept of the rule of law has gained some momentum within the United Nations system. In 2005, at the World Summit, we collectively agreed on the importance of universal adherence to, and implementation of, the rule of law, both at the national and international levels. The resolutions that the Security Council has adopted on this subject since 2003 and the establishment of the Policy Office for the Rule of Law within the Secretariat highlight the importance that the United Nations attaches to this concept. Despite the strides made, much still needs to be done.

Strengthening the rule of law at the international level is critical not only for effectively addressing current global challenges, but also for reinforcing the principle itself as the very foundation of peaceful coexistence between nations. World peace will forever be difficult to attain unless the principles of the rule of law are applied to relations between States and other subjects of international law. The need to increase compliance with international legal treaties and conventions and the United Nations Charter cannot be overemphasized. Consistency in the application of international law and the democratization of international relations are also key to building a just world order. Double standards degrade the integrity of the international legal system.

All laws are made by human beings, and, for the laws to be applied effectively, they must enjoy the trust and support of the people. If the faith of the international community in the rule of law is to be sustained, flagrant violations of international law without any consequences must be a thing of the past. The law must apply to both the mighty and the weak, to the rich and the poor alike. In that regard, we need to work together towards strengthening the International Court of Justice and other international dispute resolution mechanisms. The era of impunity must be no more. Enforcing accountability for crimes punishable under international law must become the norm. Justice for the victims of the most heinous crimes and the reconciliation of societies ravaged by violence will not be possible unless we have a strong international criminal justice system. It is in that spirit that we acknowledge the work done by the International Criminal Court and other international criminal tribunals in entrenching the traditions of the rule of law. Let us commit to supporting them in their noble course and pledge our cooperation with them.

The application of the rule of law at the national level is a cornerstone for building stable and resilient societies. In our view, the rule of law at the national level promotes social interaction among citizens and Government in a legal environment in which basic freedoms and human rights are respected and protected. It is in that spirit that Lesotho, as a country ruled by a Government that is democratically elected through equal and universal suffrage, has resolved to advance the rule of law as an answer to many challenges that besiege it. Lesotho is committed to respect for the rule of law and the protection of the rights and freedoms of its citizens, as enshrined in the country's Constitution. It is only in an environment where basic freedoms are protected that individuals and groups can reach their full potential in realizing their aspirations.

Lesotho has made modest strides in strengthening the rule of law at the national level. Inequality between men and women has been addressed to a large degree. Legislation aimed at empowering and protecting women was enacted in 2006. That act provides for equal rights between spouses. Women are now free to enter into binding contracts and to access loans from financial institutions. Moreover, during the life of the current

Parliament, we have resolved to fight corruption by strengthening the judicial system.

We will do so by, among other things, creating relevant and adequately resourced judicial structures to fight this menace, which will undoubtedly go a long way to addressing some of the social ills affecting our people on a daily basis.

Let me conclude by pointing out that the journey we have taken thus far is a clear sign of our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. It is on the strength of the principles of the Charter that the rule of law stands out as the most indispensable tool for promoting a just, peaceful and prosperous world. The supremacy of the law over all individuals, ensuring access to justice and the independence of the judiciary, should be our common pledge today.

This High-level Meeting should not be an end in itself but, rather, the beginning of a process in which the rule of law can be more intensively advocated for, venerated and actively practised. The Declaration we have adopted today (resolution 67/1) is a step in the right direction. It is now time for us to collectively turn vision and political will into concrete commitments that will ensure that the universally pursued principle of the rule of law remains an important hallmark of our civilization.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Independent State of Samoa.

Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa): The global challenges to human development and security are multiplying and becoming more complex. The United Nations was created to bring about universal justice. It is uniquely placed to lead and coordinate global initiatives to achieve that noble goal. Today's meeting is timely, and its focus on the rule of law pertinent. Strengthening the rule of law at the national and international levels is key to guaranteeing peace and security, human rights, and social and economic justice for all.

But our discussion today should not be a one-off effort. It must be the start of a concerted and continuing process. The achievement of the rule of law at all levels should be the objective of every Member State. The challenge is to ensure that a coordinated approach is in place to develop effective instruments to address the interrelated threats to the peaceful coexistence of peoples and nations. But the United Nations must do more than that. There must also be a means for the Organization to ensure that the rhetoric we preach is in fact being practised.

The rule of law does not exist in a void. Ultimately, it is in the way that individual Governments realize international norms and behaviours at a local level that the rule of law has meaning and benefits ordinary people everywhere. Only then can the long-term sustainability of the rule of law be assured.

Samoa has no military forces and is not a member of any military grouping. Therefore, our only guaranteed security and protection is strict observance of the rule of law. In addition, our cultural institutions and our traditional system of chiefs have helped maintain peace in our land — a system that has served us well for more than 3,000 years, long before our first contact with Western influences. Those are the foundational pillars on which our society is built, helping to ensure stability and an improved quality of life for all. Respect for the rule of law has been an integral part of Samoa's journey as a proud, independent nation for 50 years now. Let me therefore highlight a few examples of how we are contributing to strengthening the rule of law at all levels.

To increase our compliance with international law, we have established a law and justice sector, launching a four-year plan with a vision of justice for a safe and stable Samoa. The sector plan focuses on improving and strengthening our legal system and services by increasing community safety, improving access to justice, integrating customary and community-based justice with the formal justice system, and promoting integrity and good governance.

One product of the sector plan was the establishment of the Samoa Law Reform Commission, which is currently conducting a comprehensive review of existing legislation and regulations to ensure that they reflect present-day realities, congruent with the culture and traditions of a changing and modernizing Samoan society, and in line with our international obligations. The Commission works closely with relevant stakeholders and members of the public to assess legislative compliance with international conventions, particularly the human rights conventions to which Samoa is party. Its works are published and its final reports are presented to Samoa's legislative assembly.

Samoa is fully committed to the peacekeeping work of the United Nations, which is one of the Organization's most effective and successful mandates. The small size of our police force has not prevented us from contributing officers to peacekeeping operations in South Sudan and Timor-Leste and to the Regional Assessment Mission to Solomon Islands. We are proud that more than 30 per cent of our peacekeepers are women, already surpassing the United Nations goal.

Samoa is also a participating country in the Justice Rapid Response multilateral stand-by facility. Being part of that initiative underscores our strong support for ensuring that all serious violations of human rights and international law must be investigated and brought to justice.

Our long-term vision of an improved quality of life for all Samoans is the key underpinning of our development strategy for the period from 2012 to 2016. A major goal of that strategy is strengthening social cohesion and stability and meeting the need to put legislation in place to help meet that ultimate goal. The strategy includes concrete targets to support our Government's efforts to provide an environment that will promote private-sector development, mindful of our responsibilities and obligations as a member of the World Trade Organization, beginning in May.

Women parliamentarians have been an integral feature of all branches of our legislature throughout our 50-year history. An amendment to our Constitution reserving 10 per cent of seats for women, to be enacted before the end of this year, will ensure that they have a guaranteed minimum level of representation in our national Parliament.

Samoa regards the International Criminal Court as an important part of the architecture of world peace based on the rule of law. The institutionalization of the Court, 10 years ago, was a major achievement in the protection of human rights and in upholding international humanitarian standards. The unanimous approval, last year, of the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute allows the crimes of aggression to be finally added to the list of crimes that cannot go unpunished.

In line with the spirit of today's meeting, I would like to conclude by making a pledge that I will implement this week before I leave New York. Samoa is committed to ensuring that the rule of law is respected, and adhered to, at all levels. I am therefore happy to announce that, tomorrow, Samoa will ratify the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on crimes of aggression as part of the United Nations treaty event.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Asylbek Jeenbekov, Speaker of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr. Jeenbekov (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): Respecting and strengthening the principle of the rule of law is at the very core of the activities of any democratic nation. The mandatory limitation by laws and treaties of all parties to legal relationships, from the citizen to the State itself, is key to a country's sustainable development and to the economic growth and prosperity of its people.

The Kyrgyz Republic is firmly committed to the principle of the rule of law at the international and national levels. Kyrgyzstan has acceded to many fundamental international treaties, thereby reaffirming its commitment to the principle of the rule of law at the international level. In total, the Kyrgyz Republic has met its responsibilities under 40 international human rights instruments within the United Nations and 42 conventions of the International Labour Organization, as well as the Helsinki Final Act, thereby reaffirming its respect for the principles and norms of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on the protection and promotion of universal values, the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

We are firmly committed to implementing our nation's international obligations. In line with international relations, we support strict compliance with the universally recognized principles and standards of international law. We also seek both to limit and to underpin Government activities in order to ensure respect for a person's dignity, freedom, justice and legal protection in relations both with the Government and with other individuals.

At the national level, we are improving the regulatory and legal frameworks and are pursuing complex reforms to enhance the judicial, law enforcement and penitentiary systems, to ensure gender equality, to strengthen the role of young people and to protect the rights of the child and the poor. We intend to continue to firmly abide by such robust principles of international law, to move forward strictly in line with the law and to ensure equality before the law, the

protection of human rights, the independence of the legal system and a fair justice system.

That is demonstrated by my country's democratic reforms. In the past two and a half years, following the events of 2010, we made an enormous effort to guarantee the rule of law in our country. We adopted a new Constitution that transformed Kyrgyzstan into a parliamentary democracy. We held transparent and fair parliamentary and presidential elections. Conditions were established for the media to be able to work independently. We have also declared an unprecedented war against corruption and organized crime.

Implementing the rule of law remains a complex challenge, in particular for developing countries, owing to limited resources to support relevant institutions and mechanisms that need to be reformed. While the rule of law is based on laws, the laws themselves are insufficient to uphold the rule of law.

A legal constitution also does not necessarily prove the establishment of governance on the basis of the principle of the rule of law. In that regard, the law is not an arithmetical sum of legal standards on paper, but a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that combines justice and humanism in society and governance. Kyrgyzstan's commitment to such an idea is seen in the constitutional standard that core freedoms and human rights determine the very essence and form of the activities of the legislative and executive bodies and of local Government, inasmuch as they are protected by the law and the courts. The issue of the rule of law is closely related to ensuring the quality of laws.

Another problem is weak legislation. Making frequent and, at times, unwarranted amendments to laws underscores the importance of the quality of laws. Successfully dealing with that issue means tackling a host of mutually related political, organizational and other matters. Kyrgyzstan strives to ensure that the ordinary citizen feels that he or she can participate on policy and knows what issue is being addressed by an adopted law. Citizen confidence in their involvement in Government activities and their understanding and trust in the usefulness of restrictions and prohibitions can ensure confidence in regulatory and legal instruments.

That is why we have in place an important procedure for the public discussion of laws that we have adopted. That is provided for in our law on regulatory and legal acts. Under that law, draft regulations and laws that directly affect the interests of citizens and entities, as well as those that seek to regulate business activities, are subject to public discussion through their posting on the official site of the submitting body, that is, the Government or Parliament, as well as through the holding of round tables and public and parliamentary hearings. Laws are then adopted at the third reading, with a 10-day interval between each reading.

We believe that the United Nations must be at the very heart of efforts to provide effective assistance to countries in the area of the rule of law. The United Nations must continue to make efforts to develop a holistic approach to sustainable development, encompassing the goals of economic development and social and environmental protection. The rule of law must play a critical role in ensuring equal protection and access to opportunity.

The Acting President: I shall now give the floor to representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position on resolution 67/1, which the General Assembly earlier during this meeting.

Before giving the floor to speakers, however, may I remind delegations that explanations should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to put on record that we have reservations with regard to paragraph 28 of resolution 67/1, entitled "Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels". The full observance of international law by States without preferential treatment or privilege will make it possible to arrive at a fair international order of solidarity, where the interests of all the world's peoples take precedence. Only in that way will it be possible to contribute to strengthening the rule of law and international peace and security. Without the existence of a truly democratic system in the United Nations, and particularly with regard to the configuration and decision-taking of the Security Council, the achievement of an international system where the rule of law prevails will continue to remain a utopian dream.

Therefore the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela expresses reservations with regard to paragraph 28 of resolution 67/1 adopted today, as it refers favourably to the work of the Security Council. My country, Venezuela, believes that that body is far from making a positive contribution to the rule of law and the

maintenance of international peace and security. On several occasions it has contributed to seeing that the rule of law and the principles of international law have been violated. The abusive implementation of resolution 1973 (2011) on Libya and the treatment of the Palestinian question are just a few telling examples. Hence, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like this statement to be part and parcel of the adoption of the outcome document (resolution 67/1) and would like our reservations about paragraph 28 to be reflected in the official record of this High-level Meeting.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Delgado Sánchez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba acknowledges the fact that resolution 67/1, entitled "Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels", which was adopted earlier, contains elements which can favour the international establishment of the rule of law. Among those, it is worth mentioning that paragraph 36 of the resolution clearly states that a true rule of law means that the international economic, monetary and financial organizations should be made democratic so they serve the development of peoples and not the permanent enrichment of a few. Also, paragraph 11 of the Declaration unambiguously refers to national ownership in all rule-of-law activities. That is a prerogative which cannot be replaced or usurped.

Sovereign equality, the good faith fulfilment of commitments entered into by States, the peaceful resolution of disputes, abstention from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and non-selectivity must be the underlying principles of States at all times and in the promotion of the rule of law, as is clearly stated in paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Declaration. However, in Cuba's view, paragraph 28 of the Declaration, which has been anti-democratically imposed, contradicts what was previously stated by suggesting that the Security Council has made positive contributions to the rule of law. That body and its permanent members that are members of NATO have often violated international law and the Council's own decisions in order to impose their political agenda and military domination over developing countries.

Also, paragraph 28 runs counter to the appeal by the majority of the international community that that body and its members act in accordance with international law. Similarly, paragraph 35 of the resolution adopted today also very weakly reflects the commitment to Security Council reform. Thus, although Cuba was not opposed to that resolution being adopted without a vote, we would like to indicate our reservations on the aforementioned aspects, and we wish to see them duly reflected in the official record of this High-level Meeting.

Lastly, allow me to add that Cuba condemns and demands the immediate renegotiation of all the extraterritorial provisions that make up the commercial, economic and financial blockade imposed against Cuba for more than 50 years, and it urges the United States of America to comply without further delay with what is stated in paragraph 9 of the high-level Declaration.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua.

Mr. Santos López (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor, allow me to congratulate Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his election to the presidency and to assure him of the support of my delegation. I also extend the words of congratulations and support to the other elected members.

Nicaragua acknowledges the endeavours of the co-facilitators to arrive at resolution 67/1 on the rule of law, which was adopted by consensus today. Nicaragua aligns itself with the consensus. However, we would like to make certain points in that regard. We welcome the inclusion in resolution 67/1 of issues such as the peaceful resolution of disputes, the International Court of Justice, the references to human rights, children and women, among other issues. Despite the fact that the issue of the peaceful resolution of disputes is included in the resolution, we would have liked to have seen greater emphasis on it, given that in recent years conflicts have taken truly worrying turns in that they have once again highlighted the urgent need to eliminate the implementation of unilateral coercive measures and the irrational extraterritorial implementation of domestic legislation. We say, once again, that the General Assembly must play its true role in consolidating the rule of law at the international level and ensure that such unilateral action does not continue to be taken.

Nicaragua would also have liked to have seen greater emphasis on the role of the International Court of Justice, as that is the means par excellence for the

resolution of disputes. Based on our experience over the past 26 years, Nicaragua has been a plaintiff or defendant in eight principal cases and other incidental ones brought before the International Court of Justice, sometimes at extremely difficult times for our nation. In 2001, Nicaragua expressed its reservations with regard to the acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, but we have never invoked the reservation. On the contrary, we have always vested our confidence in the work of the International Court of Justice, as we believe that its work contributes not only to promoting, strengthening and disseminating the rule of law, but also that its work is crucial in the implementation of commitments to preserve the sovereign equality of all States — the fundamental principle of the United Nations and the paramount desire of mankind.

For that reason, Nicaragua takes this opportunity to announce before the General Assembly that, starting in October, Nicaragua will, by presidential decree, formally withdraw its aforementioned reservation.

The Charter of the United Nations attributes the role of maintaining international peace and security to the Security Council. It is the obligation of the Security Council to fully carry out that task and not to usurp the role of other bodies, in particular that of the General Assembly. In addition, I must state that it is not the role of this body to promote the rule of law, but rather, that responsibility is attributed to States. The document, approved by senior officials, had to be worded generally and could not refer to information on matters such as the post-2015 agenda and follow-up methods. Such matters should be approved and considered by experts, rather than be mentioned in a high-level document.

Allow me to conclude by expressing our reservations about the aforementioned points. I also thank the President and the co-facilitators for their endeavours towards a successful resolution that enjoys a true consensus.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia joined the consensus on resolution 67/1 entitled "Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels", adopted this morning by the General Assembly.

Bolivia is aware that international democratic governance is fundamental for ensuring rule of law, democracy and justice. In that regard, my country would emphasize that the Plurinational State of Bolivia adopted its political Constitution through a constitutional referendum in 2009. That was a major step forward in decisively strengthening the rule of law and in implementing our Constitution.

Based on that framework, in October 2011 the first direct elections of the highest authorities of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Environmental Court, the Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal and the Council of the Judiciary were held, and their compositions reflect the new criteria of multiculturalism and gender equality, as well as the election of indigenous judges and magistrates. That unprecedented election of the highest judicial authorities was held in an atmosphere of peace and citizen participation, as a unique tool aimed at strengthening independent and impartial justice.

However, Bolivia wishes to place on record its reservation about paragraph 28 of the aforementioned document. We would like the Secretariat to ensure that our reservation is reflected in the record of this meeting.

Bolivia welcomes the maintenance of peace and condemns aggression of any form. The traditional peaceful spirit of the Bolivian people has been reflected in the Constitution, which establishes the fact that Bolivia is a peaceful State promoting peace and the right to peace as well as cooperation among the peoples of the region and the world and rejecting any form of aggression as a means of resolving conflicts among States. In that context, our own Constitution prohibits the installation of any foreign military base on the territory of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Our reservation complies with the duty to do all and everything that is possible to avoid unilateralism and interventionism, which are defined as being contrary to the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council has been pursuing a certain logic for more than 60 years. The Plurinational State of Bolivia believes that the twenty-first century should be one of great decisions, and that comprehensive reform of the Security Council can no longer be delayed, in order to ensure that all Members of the United Nations are equally part and parcel of matters relating to the

maintenance of international peace and security. In that light, paragraph 35 of the document that we have adopted should reflect the true, urgent and undeniable need for urgent Security Council reform. In that context, we reiterate our reservation regarding paragraph 28 of the document. We humbly request the Secretariat to ensure that our reservation is reflected in the record of today's meeting.

The meeting rose at 2.20 p.m.